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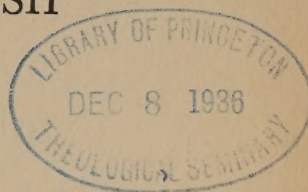
THE GOSPEL PARABLES IN THE LIGHT OF  
THEIR JEWISH BACKGROUND

[WARBURTON LECTURES]





THE GOSPEL PARABLES IN THE  
LIGHT OF THEIR JEWISH  
BACKGROUND



BY  
✓  
W. O. E. OESTERLEY, D.D., LITT.D.

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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE following lectures were delivered in Lincoln's Inn Chapel as long ago as 1915-1919. Incessant pressure of other work has hitherto stood in the way of their publication in accordance with the terms of the lecturer's appointment. For this apologies are herewith tendered to the honourable Benchers. The delay in publication may, however, have this advantage, that during the intervening years some important books and articles on the parables have appeared, of which the writer has taken cognizance; if this has resulted in considerable revision, modification, and amplification of the lectures in their original form, it is hoped that this may be all to the good.

The main purpose of these lectures is to study the Gospel parables from the point of view of their Jewish environment; much, therefore, which would usually, and rightly, be looked for in a book dealing with the parables is left aside here; for this there are plenty of other books which can be consulted. Nevertheless, it is hoped that some illustrative and useful material may have been offered.

As to the illustrations from Rabbinical literature, some of these I have gathered by my own researches, but for the majority I am indebted to Jewish scholars, Bacher, Abrahams, Montefiore, Loewe, and others; their knowledge of Rabbinics is naturally vastly greater than that of non-Jews, so that it seemed wisest to rely on their translations. Use has, of course, been made of the enormous work of Strack and Billerbeck; but their illustrations from Rabbinical literature are not always analogous, sometimes they are far-fetched and irrelevant.

These lectures are not intended for experts; technicalities and textual problems are, therefore, with few exceptions, avoided.

It was only after the completion of the following pages that Dr. Dodd's recently published volume, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, came into my hands, so that it was not possible for me to make full use of it; the publishers, however, very courteously let me have the manuscript back in order that I might, at any rate, add some footnotes in the light of his illuminating work.

I desire to express my warm thanks to Miss Hippisley, S.Th., of King's College, University of London, for having very kindly corrected the proof-sheets of this volume and verified all the references.

*January, 1936.*

W. O. E. OESTERLEY.

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## INTRODUCTORY





## LECTURE I

### PARABLES: THEIR MEANING AND NATURE

IN seeking to ascertain what is meant by a parable both in its simple and more extended forms it is essential to begin by turning to the Old Testament; for although there are plenty of parables, in varied forms, found outside the Old Testament<sup>1</sup> they are unimportant from the point of view of our present study.

The Hebrew word for "parable" is *mashal*, the root meaning of which is "to be like." Thus, one of the earliest proverbs mentioned in the Old Testament runs: "Out of the wicked cometh forth wickedness"; this is spoken of as "a proverb of the ancients," and means that the words and acts of the wicked correspond with, or are like, their nature. A number of such "parables" occur in the Old Testament, and in this simplest form they may be described as popular sayings which in their nature consist of something universally recognized as true. But the term *mashal* is used in a very much wider sense than this; indeed, many of the "parables" in the strict sense occurring in the Old Testament contain no idea of likeness, nor do they, in many cases, present anything in the nature of a correspondence or comparison. In the book of Numbers, for example, there are a variety of utterances to which the term *mashal*, or parable, is applied, but which are in reality oracles; thus, in Num. xxiii. 7 it is said: "And he took up his parable, and said"; there follows what, according to verse 5, is an oracle ("And Yahweh put a word into Balaam's mouth, and said, Return unto Balak, and thus shalt thou speak . . .").

Again, twice in the book of Job (xxvii. 1, xxix. 1) it is said that Job "took up his parable"; but what follows is a discourse which contains nothing in the shape of a similitude or comparison; see also Ps. xlix. 4 ff. (Hebr. 5 ff.).

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Buzy, *Introduction aux Paraboles Évangéliques*, pp. 170 ff. (1912).

Various instances occur in which the term must be understood in the sense of a contemptuous saying; thus, in 1 Kgs. ix. 7 it is said that "Israel shall be a proverb (*mashal*) and a byword among all peoples," which must evidently mean that the peoples will show their contempt for Israel by uttering a scornful saying; such a saying, also called a parable, occurs in Isa. xiv. 4: ". . . thou shalt take up this parable against the King of Babylon, and say, 'How hath the oppressor ceased! (hath) arrogance ceased!'" (Cp. also Deut. xxviii. 37; Jer. xxiv. 9, and elsewhere.) A still more extended use of the term is when it is applied to an allegory; so, for example, in Ezek. xvii. 2: "Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable unto the house of Israel"; there follows a clear example of an allegory; similarly in Ezek. xxiv. 3 ff., cp. xx. 49 (Hebr. xxi. 5).

The most usual form of the parable or proverb is, however, that of a wise saying, containing the idea of a comparison; this is the development of the earliest form of a proverb, and itself develops into the form of a miniature essay, such as occurs, *e.g.*, in Prov. xxxi, and often in Ecclesiasticus.

> Whatever other uses a "parable" served, its prime purpose was to *teach*. It is important to bear in mind the various forms of the parable as found in the Old Testament, for, as we shall see, in the Gospels there is a similar variety.

It should also be pointed out that in the Old Testament there are instances in which a passage consists of what, in its essence, is a parable, but which is not so called. For example, we have in Judg. ix. 7-15 a discourse which, as containing a comparison, is clearly of the nature of a parable, though we should describe it as a fable; it is not, however, called a parable. Again, in 2 Sam. xii. 1-4 Nathan's words to David contain a comparison, and, though it is clearly what we should call a parable, it is not so described. In Isa. v. 1, 2, there is a comparison between the Lord's vineyard and the nation, which is an allegory, but it is not called a parable. There are other instances of a similar kind. In the Gospels this will also be found to be the case.

In the large variety of what are called parables in the Old Testament, whether so described or not, the great majority are easily understood, and are intended to be so. But there are also cases in which the meaning is not immediately apparent, and which demand consideration before they can be generally understood; indeed, they are intended to be obscure in order to force thought, and they can only be understood by the discerning. This is brought out, for example, by the use of the word *chidah*, "riddle" or "perplexing saying," as synonymous with parable; thus, in Ps. xlix. 4 (Hebr. 5) it is said: "I will incline mine ear to a parable; I will open my dark saying (*chidah*) upon the harp"; so, too, in Ps. lxxviii. 2: "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings of old." This applies not only to longer discourses, historical or others, such as Ezek. xvii. 2 ff., "Son of man, put forth a riddle (*chidah*), and speak a parable (*mashal*) unto the house of Israel," but also to short sayings, proverbs in the ordinary sense; thus in Prov. i. 6 it is said: ". . . To understand a proverb (*mashal*), and a satire; the words of the wise and their dark sayings (*chidah*)."

Under parables in the Old Testament, then, are included short popular sayings, oracles, sapiential discourses, scornful or satirical sayings, short utterances of wisdom, allegories. Often their meaning is obvious, sometimes they require concentrated thought if they are to be understood, while there are many cases in which there is a *prima facie* meaning which is straightforward, but also a deeper significance which can be apprehended only by the more discerning (*recipitur ad modum recipientis*).

Coming now to the post-biblical literature we find that, as in Proverbs, so in Ecclesiasticus the term *mashal* is used in reference to the contents of the book;<sup>1</sup> these are largely based on the pattern of Proverbs, but frequently the "proverbs" take a more extended form than is usual in the earlier book. The scribe is spoken of as one "who pre-

<sup>1</sup> In the Hebrew of the subscription to the book, l. 27. The word is also used in xlvi. 17, but in reference to Solomon's "parables"; the reference is to Proverbs.

serveth the discourses of men of renown, and entereth into the subtleties of parables; he seeketh out the hidden things of proverbs, and is conversant with the dark things of parables.”<sup>1</sup> It may well be that in the extended form of proverbs which we meet with in Ecclesiasticus we may discern a development which tended in the direction of the development of a proverb into the form which we should call a parable. Ben-Sira often takes a central theme and enlarges upon it; from this to a narrative illustrating a central theme is an easy transition; in that form we get the parable in our sense of the word. The other books of the Apocrypha, with one exception, offer but little towards the understanding of the subject under consideration. The exception is 2 (4) Esdras, which, though included in the Apocrypha, belongs properly to the apocalyptic literature, and to a later date (or dates, for it is composite). In this book we have several examples of parables in the fuller sense, *e.g.* vii. 3-5, 6-9, viii. 2, 3, and allegories, *e.g.*, in iv. 13-19, ix. 38 ff., xi. 1 ff.; these are, however, too long to quote.

Of a special character are the parables, or visions, in the *Book of Enoch* (xxxvii-lxxi, *circa* 94-79 B.C.); as applied to these, “parable” is used “pretty much in the same sense as in Num. xxiv. 3, 15, Job xxvii. 1, and means merely an elaborate discourse, whether in the form of a vision, prophecy, or poem.”<sup>2</sup> It must suffice to draw attention to these without going into details, which would take us too far afield.

The various forms of parables to which reference has been made are of importance for the study of the Gospel parables; but of even greater importance are the parables in the Rabbinical literature. To these we turn next.

It is necessary to point out, first, how this literature came into existence; this is both interesting and instructive, for the materials of which this literature is made up began to accumulate during the two centuries, approximately, immediately preceding the beginning of the Christian era,

<sup>1</sup> This is from the Greek; the Hebrew is not extant.

<sup>2</sup> Charles, *The Book of Enoch*, p. 70 (1912).



and the process continued during and after the time of our Lord.

Before the Written Law had assumed the character of canonical Scripture—before the time, that is, when it was forbidden to alter or add anything in or to the sacred text—its study and interpretation resulted in an accumulation of comments, and the like, which became known as the Oral Law.<sup>1</sup> This Oral Law or Tradition was in a constant state of development, being adapted, modified, and expanded from time to time to meet the varying practical needs of successive ages, and itself passing from the oral stage to the written. After centuries of discussion it first assumed a written form in the Mishna, the earliest text-book of the Oral Law, which was compiled about A.D. 200. The text of the Mishna became in turn the subject of interpretation and commentary in the later Rabbinical schools of Palestine and Babylonia, the results of which are crystallized in what are known as the Babylonian Talmud and the Jerusalem Talmud. The active work of the Jewish schools embodied in these, containing the investigation, interpretation, and expansion of the text of Scripture, continued roughly from 300 B.C. to A.D. 500. Besides this, there is what is known as the *Tosephta*, i.e. “Addition,” or “Supplement,” to the Mishna, the *Baraitha*, i.e. material “external” to the Mishna, and the Midrashic works. Of the latter the two most important, from the present point of view, are *Sifre* (a Midrash<sup>2</sup> on Numbers and Deuteronomy), and *Mekilta* (a Midrash on Exodus); but interesting parables occur also in the Midrash *Shir-ha-Shirim* (Song of Songs) and Midrash *Kohleleth* (Ecclesiastes). The parables contained in these writings are of very various dates, and in their present form are all post-Christian, the earliest belonging to the end of the first century A.D.; but it is highly probable that many of them have been handed down from earlier times; as

<sup>1</sup> The theory that the Oral Law was given to Moses together with the Written Law on Mount Sinai is of late date; it occurs in the Midrash *Shemoth Rabba* (Exodus) to xxxiv. 27; this Midrash belongs to the eleventh or twelfth century A.D., though it contains much earlier material.

<sup>2</sup> Midrash means a “searching out” or studying, i.e., of the Law. The term occurs in 2 Chron. xiii. 22, xxiv. 27.

Fiebig<sup>1</sup> says, the material contained in the Rabbinical literature was originally handed down orally; first stored up in the memory, it was uttered by word of mouth from teacher to pupil and thus preserved, until ultimately put down in writing,—a process similar to that in which the material of the Gospels was handed down.

The great mass of Rabbinical literature, which has been carefully preserved from the beginning, belongs chronologically to two periods, called respectively that of the "Teachers," and that of the "Interpreters." The Aramaic word for "Teacher" is *Tanna*, that for "Interpreter" is *Amora*, so that these two periods are known respectively as the Tannaitic and the Amoraic. The material belonging to the former of these, being the earlier in date, is the more important for our purposes; it covers the period approximately, 300 B.C.—A.D. 200; but the literature of the later period, roughly to A.D. 500, is not without importance on account of the earlier material often incorporated in it. A notable feature of this entire body of Rabbinical literature is that it does not consist of lengthy treatises, but almost wholly of the utterances of individual teachers; and these utterances are for the most part, though by no means always, short; often they consist of a single sentence. Everything that is recorded is the outcome, in the last instance, of thought concerning some biblical text, often a single word, and is intended to be explanatory of Holy Scripture.

Now, as Fiebig points out, since this study of the Scriptures occupied almost the whole of the higher intellectual life of the learned Jews during the first five Christian centuries, the Rabbinical literature represents the deposit of Jewish intellectual activity during this period. It will thus be evident that one must not confuse the date of a particular writing which has incorporated a particular citation with the date of the citation itself. It is a very fortunate thing that in this Rabbinical literature the origin of a citation is almost always indicated either by the mention of the name of the Rabbi cited, or else by special formulas. Thus,

<sup>1</sup> *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu im Lichte der Rabbinischen Gleichnisse des neutestamentlichen Zeitalters*, p. 1 (1912).

citations dating from the earlier, Tannaitic, period are introduced by the formula: "Our teachers have handed down," or: "It has been handed down," or similar words; citations belonging to the later, Amoraic, period can usually be recognized by their being introduced by the formula: "It has been said." Another way whereby the period to which a citation belongs can be fixed, when the name of a Rabbi is not mentioned, is by its language; as a general rule, a citation belonging to the Tannaitic period is in Hebrew (Neo-Hebrew), whereas, if it belongs to the Amoraic period, it is in Aramaic.<sup>1</sup>

It is from this large body of Rabbinical literature, then, that we get illustrations of the Jewish method of teaching by means of the parable. The nature and characteristics of Jewish parables may be briefly indicated; illustrations need not be given here, as a number will be found in the lectures which follow. Of the various types of parables we have, first, parables pure and simple: that is, narratives presenting scenes from life, the meaning of which is clear and straightforward; they teach lessons easy to be understood, and in every case of this kind a comparison is presented. Then there are parables which contain a metaphor; it may or may not be a simple metaphor, but an explanation often follows. Many others, again, are allegories, at times somewhat obscure; and in a number of cases allegory and metaphor occur in one and the same parable, and even a parable of the simplest type may contain allegorical or metaphorical elements.

The great majority of the Rabbinical parables are exegetical; they purport to explain difficulties in the Scriptures, and especially in the Pentateuch; the exaltation of the Law, and the need of observing its ordinances are very often the purpose of these parables. Unlike the few parables found in the Old Testament, and unlike so many of those in the Gospels, the Rabbinical parables are not prompted by surrounding circumstances; they have not, that is to say, the practical value of these; a great many have merely a theoretical interest, useful for the students of Scripture in

<sup>1</sup> Fiebig, *op. cit.*, p. 2.



the Rabbinical schools, but of little help to the masses. On reading these parables one is often struck by their want of logical sequence, by gaps in the chain of thought, by quaint parallelisms, and inconsequent deductions. A foremost Oriental scholar draws attention in an illuminating way to "the inveterate tendency of Jewish teachers to convey their doctrine, not in the form of abstract discourse, but in a mode appealing directly to the imagination, and seeking to arouse the interest and sympathy of the *man* rather than the philosopher. The Rabbi embodies his lesson in a story, whether parable, or allegory, or seeming historical narrative; and the last thing he or his disciples would think of is to ask whether the selected persons, events, and circumstances which so vividly suggest the doctrine are in themselves real or fictitious. The doctrine is everything; the mode of presentation has no independent value. To make the story the first consideration, and the doctrine it was intended to convey an afterthought, as we, with our dry Western literalness, are predisposed to do, is to reverse the Jewish order of thinking, and to do unconscious injustice to the authors of many edifying narratives of antiquity." <sup>1</sup> A point of much interest is, that there seems to have been a certain number of what may be called parabolic themes, which were used by different Rabbis for the purpose of teaching different truths, or of illustrating different facts; the commonest of these are those of a certain king who does or says something, which constitutes the parable; those which present the scene of a feast; and those which deal with some agricultural topic, such as a field or a vineyard. These parabolical themes seem to have formed the framework of many of the Rabbinical parables; they are manipulated and filled in in various ways by different Rabbis in accordance with the teaching it was desired to inculcate. This point is of special interest inasmuch as in a number of the Gospel parables these very parabolic themes are utilized; in some cases our Lord uses the same theme in different connexions. One cannot, however, fail to notice the immense difference both in subject-matter and treatment and, above all, in applica-

<sup>1</sup> C. J. Ball, in *The Speaker's Commentary*, ii. 307 (1888).



tion, between the Gospel parables and those of the Rabbis; interesting and instructive as the latter often are, they stand on an altogether lower plane. It is not prejudice that prompts us to say this—far from that, we have a feeling of warm sympathy with a great deal of the Rabbinical teaching; but we are convinced that any impartial reader of the two sets of parables, the Gospel and the Rabbinical, will be forced to admit that the latter compare very unfavourably with the former.

Another point of interest, small though it be, is the similarity of the introductory formulas of parables both in the Gospels and in the Rabbinical literature, showing again a common background in external form. Thus, in the latter we find introductory formulas such as these: "A parable," often followed by the parable itself without intervening words; at other times: "A parable; it is like . . ." Again, a parable is frequently introduced by: "Wherewith is it to be compared?" or "I will set forth a parable." Often, too, a parable is introduced without any introductory formula. With these we may compare some of the ways in which parables are introduced in the Gospels: "For (it is) as (when) a man . . ." (Matth. xxv. 14); or, without any introductory words: "A man planted a vineyard . . ." (Mk. xii. 1); "Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto . . ." (Matth. xxv.); "So is the Kingdom of God, as if a man . . ." (Mk. iv. 26); "Another parable set he before them" (Matth. xiii. 24); "The Kingdom of Heaven is like . . ." (Matth. xiii. 24); "Whereunto shall I liken the Kingdom of God?" (Lk. xiii. 20). One can see at once that there is a family likeness between these respective introductory formulas; and if we had the Gospel parables in their original language the likeness would be seen to be still more striking.

But we must now turn more particularly to the Gospel parables themselves in order to offer some general preliminary considerations concerning them.

While recognizing that the parables were first put forth in oral form, and that they may, therefore, have undergone some alteration in course of transmission; while recognizing

also that their original written form may in some cases have been subjected to modification at the hands of the early Christian communities for reasons which will be referred to later, we affirm, nevertheless, in spite of the contentions of some scholars on the subject,<sup>1</sup> that the parables, so far as their essence is concerned, are, in their present form, substantially the same as when first uttered by our Lord. In his recently published book on the parables Dr. Dodd writes: "They have upon them, taken as a whole, the stamp of a highly individual mind, in spite of the re-handling they have inevitably suffered in the course of transmission. . . . Certainly there is no part of the Gospel record which has for the reader a clearer ring of authenticity."<sup>2</sup>

Using the term "parable" (*marshal*) in its Old Testament connotation—and, as we have seen, the usage is very similar in the New Testament—as embracing a variety of forms, it will be seen that the Gospel parables comprise four types. First, there is that of the simple saying, *e.g.*: "And he spake also a parable unto them, Can the blind guide the blind? shall they not both fall into a pit?" (Lk. vi. 39). "And he said unto them, Doubtless ye will say unto me this parable, Physician, heal thyself" (Lk. iv. 23). Other such sayings, which are likewise parables, though the term is not used, occur, *e.g.*: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" (Matth. v. 13). "Ye are the light of the world" (Matth. v. 14). "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine" (Matth. vii. 6). "They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick" (Matth. ix. 12). These are all simple, straightforward sayings, the meaning of which can be grasped by everyone; it is quite possible that some of them were current proverbs familiar to the people, and for that very reason utilized by our Lord. Then we have parables, in the more ordinary sense of the word, which contain a comparison; though these are not necessarily called parables in the text, they

<sup>1</sup> Drews, *Christusmythe* (1910); Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu* (1910); Weinle, *Neutestamentliche Theologie* (1911); Cadoux, *The Parables of Jesus: their Art and Use*, pp. 15 ff. (undated).

<sup>2</sup> *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 11 (1935); cf. also Cadoux, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

are such in their nature; for example: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened" (Matth. xiii. 33); or: "But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what watch the thief was coming, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken through. Therefore, be ye also ready . . ." (Matth. xxiv. 43). Another instructive illustration is that of one coming to his friend at midnight asking for the loan of three loaves (Lk. xi. 5 ff.). All the parables of this type which contain a simple comparison, are, again, easy to be understood. Of the third type we have not many in the Gospels; they are those which are allegorical, *e.g.* the parable of the Sheep and Goats (Matth. xxv. 31-46), the parable of the Wicked Husbandmen (Mk. xii. 1-12), and the parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matth. xiii. 24-30); parables of this kind do not carry their meaning on the surface; they demand thought, and in some cases they are explained by our Lord. The fourth type comprises the larger number of the great Gospel parables; in so far as they contain a comparison, these are parables which might seem to belong to the simple type; but a comparison is not their only element; mingled with this there are often allegorical and metaphorical elements. In some respects these parables convey a lesson which the first listeners may have grasped; but it is certain that the fullness of the meaning enshrined in them was beyond the comprehension of those first listeners. And, what is more, all through the ages the differences of interpretation prove that there is more in the parables than has been grasped even at the present day. Simple as most of the parables seem to be, and easy to understand, when first read, there are many which are seen to be very difficult as soon as they are pondered over. To be sure, many of the parables offer no difficulty, their meaning is obvious; but there are others, belonging to this last type, in regard to which it must be said that *certitude* as to what their central theme is has not been attained; one has only to read the varieties of explanation of commentators, all having so much to commend them, to realize that the parables of this



type present us with some of the most difficult problems of New Testament study.

We have spoken of the Gospel parables as consisting of four types, and, speaking generally, that seems to be the fact; but when we come down to details and begin to define the nature of individual parables, difficulties soon appear.

Let us start with the time-honoured definition of a parable as being "an earthly story with a heavenly meaning"; nobody will deny that there is truth in this definition as far as it goes; but it does not always apply. For example, in Mk. iii. 23-26 we have this parable: "And he called them unto him, and said unto them in parables, How can Satan cast out Satan? And if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. . . . And if Satan hath risen up against himself, and is divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end." The definition does not apply to a parable like this; and there are many others to which it would not apply. And when one applies the other definitions mentioned above—comparison, metaphor, allegory—their inadequacy becomes apparent again and again as soon as the interpretation is undertaken. This will be granted, we think, in view of the following considerations. A comparison facilitates the understanding of what is taught, *i.e.* it saves thinking; but a metaphor necessitates thinking out what is meant, and is often susceptible of more than one interpretation. A comparison does not, from its nature, admit of an interpretation, it is, generally speaking, obvious; but the metaphor, as just said, requires this. Again, when the term "parable" is applied to what is an allegory, the term may be misleading; for the difference between a parable, in the generally accepted sense, and an allegory, is the same as that between "to be like" and "to mean," as between "to place side by side," and "to identify," as between "to compare" and "to indicate." However we may define the allegory, it is, like the metaphor, something that requires thinking out, only more so; but whether one defines a parable by saying that it is a "putting forth of a likeness" or a "placing side by side," or merely a "comparison," it is not a thing that requires pondering over, at any rate

not in the sense that an allegory does, nor in the sense required by a metaphor. Thus, the nature of any given parable must be decided before its interpretation can be entered upon.<sup>1</sup>

Our next consideration is concerned with the scope of any given parable; that is to say, whether it is intended to teach one or more truths; and if the latter, how is one to decide which is intended to be the central truth, and which is subsidiary? This is by no means easy, as is proved by the diversity of opinion held in regard to so many of the parables. One has only to think of such parables as those of the Unrighteous Steward and the Labourers in the Vineyard, especially the former, to realize the difficulty of coming to a satisfactory conclusion as to what is intended to be the central truth taught in either. But there are others in regard to which the question arises as to whether they teach one or more truths, and as to which is the central one. There is one test which may sometimes be of help in deciding which of two or more truths in any given parable is the central one; and that is to see whether the sense of a parable is affected by eliminating what is held to be the central truth taught. Here is an example: It may be truly maintained that one of the truths taught or implied in the parable of the Unrighteous Steward is that the betrayal of a trust brings its own punishment; but that this is not the central truth taught by the parable is proved by the fact that if it is ignored in interpreting the parable, the course and sense of the parable are not affected; nothing in the parable loses its force if the thought of this truth be left aside; in this case it is clear that this is not the central truth, the main object, for which the parable was uttered.

Once more, what must always be of great help in determining what the central truth of any given parable may be, is to study carefully the context in which the parable stands; it seems almost superfluous to say this; but parables are sometimes treated as independent entities, and are interpreted without sufficiently considering what prompted their

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the interesting chapter on "The Parable and its Point," in Cadoux, *op. cit.*, pp. 43 ff.



utterance. That which gave the reason for a parable to be spoken must be a certain guide as to its main purpose, and therefore a clear indication as to the central truth intended to be taught. We will take as an illustration Lk. xiii. 6-9: "And he spake this parable; A certain man had a fig-tree planted in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit thereon, and found none. And he said unto the vinedresser, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down, why doth it cumber the ground? And he, answering, saith unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it, and if it bear fruit thenceforth, well; but if not, thou shalt cut it down." Now, taking this parable as it stands, without reference to its context, it can either mean that unless a man leads an upright life and manifests the fruit of good living, punishment will overtake him; or it can mean that the longsuffering of God gives even the evil-living man ample chance of reforming. There is much to be said for each of these interpretations. In turning, however, to the context, one can see that the central truth which the parable teaches is neither of these; what our Lord intended to teach was the truth enforced by the words twice repeated: "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." The parable is thus meant to teach the need of bringing forth the fruits of *repentance*; and though the two other truths mentioned may be implied, neither is the object for which the parable was spoken; it can be interpreted without any thought of them, and if they are eliminated from the mind, the central teaching of the parable is not affected. It is necessary, therefore, to take the context into consideration if the central teaching of the parable is to be apprehended. It will, of course, be understood that by the context we do not necessarily mean that which precedes the utterance of a parable; there are instances in which our Lord's comments on a parable give the real clue as to its central teaching.

Nevertheless, it must be confessed that the interpretation of the parables is often a difficult matter. Many people, on reading one of the parables, would in all probability believe they knew at once what it meant; that is, provided they did

not think over it. The form and the matter of the parables are such that the cursory reader believes he recognizes almost intuitively what each is intended to teach. Yet it must strike one as extraordinary that, in spite of the often apparently obvious lesson of the parable, in spite of its, generally speaking, simple and straightforward form, there are few things connected with the study of the Gospels concerning which there is greater diversity of opinion than that of the meaning and doctrinal significance of many of the parables. Of one thing, we think, there can be little doubt, viz. that one of the causes of this diversity of opinion is the fact that the Jewish atmosphere and general background of the Gospel records are not sufficiently taken into account. It is for this reason that in the following study of the parables so much stress is laid upon this Jewish background.

There is another reason for the difficulty in ascertaining the meaning of the parables which must be briefly referred to; though here the remedy is more difficult to find. The Gospels which enshrine the parables exist only in Greek or in translations of the Greek; but our Lord spoke them in Aramaic, or rather in that dialect of Aramaic known as Galilæan Aramaic. The parables were first handed down orally in this language, and various forms of the Gospels which contain them were put forth in Greek (see the Prologue to the third Gospel); these latter form the basis of the Gospels as we now have them; so that our present Gospels constitute the third stage in the transmission. But the initial difficulty was to render the oral Aramaic form into Greek adequately. We shall see,<sup>1</sup> e.g. that the Aramaic expression for "Son of Man" cannot be properly rendered in Greek, and it may be regarded as certain that other words and expressions which occurred in the parables as originally spoken do not always, in their Greek form, represent our Lord's meaning. In this connexion the words of Ben-Sira's grandson, who translated the Hebrew of the *Wisdom of Ben-Sira* (Ecclesiasticus) into Greek, are worth quoting; they occur in the translator's Prologue to the book: "Ye are, therefore, entreated to undertake the reading (of this

<sup>1</sup> P. 33.

book) with kindness and attentiveness, and to be indulgent if in any parts of what we have laboured to interpret we seem to fall short in (the rendering of) some of the phrases. For when things spoken in Hebrew are translated into another tongue they have not quite the same meaning; and not only these things (which follow), but the Law itself, and the Prophecies, and the rest of the books, convey a different meaning when spoken in their original (language).” Needless to say, the same applies to Aramaic. It must, therefore, be recognized that, regret it as we may, certainty as to the meaning of a parable cannot always be guaranteed. Diversity of opinion on some points is in the nature of things.

One other matter demands some attention. In all three Gospels occur words to this effect: “Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand” (Matth. xiii. 13); again, in Mk. iv. 11, 12: “And he said unto them, Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all things are done in parables; that seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them”; similarly in Lk. viii. 10: “And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of God; but to the rest in parables; that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.”

Naturally enough, these passages have caused much perplexity to readers of the Gospels; the Marcan form is especially difficult, since it appears to impute to our Lord the laying down of a principle which sounds very hard in the mouth of Him Who desired of all things to turn the hearts of men to God that they might obtain forgiveness. As we deal with this whole matter in some detail when considering the parable of the Sower,<sup>1</sup> it will suffice if we say here no more than that the words in question must be understood in the sense in which they were originally spoken by the prophet (Isa. vi. 9, 10); from this it will be seen that the sense is quite different from what the Marcan passage would seem to imply.

<sup>1</sup> Pp. 51 ff.

## LECTURE II

### THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN

THE profound importance of this subject, and the dominating position it occupies in so many of our Lord's parables, as well as in His teaching elsewhere, make it essential that some special consideration should be devoted to it before dealing with the parables of the Kingdom.

We note, first, that there is no essential difference between the two expressions "the Kingdom of Heaven" and "the Kingdom of God." According to Jewish usage, "Heaven" was frequently used as a synonym for "God." The feeling of reverence which avoided the direct mention of the name of God is observable already in the literature of the early part of the last century B.C.; thus, in 1 Macc. iii. 18, 19, Judas Maccabæus says: "With Heaven it is all one, to save by many or by few; for victory in battle standeth not in the multitude of a host; but strength is from Heaven"; clearly in this passage "Heaven" is used for the Almighty. Similarly in verse 60 of the same chapter it is said: "Nevertheless, as may be the will in Heaven, so shall he do," a particularly instructive passage. In the same way, in early Rabbinical literature there are such expressions as: "the fear of Heaven," "the name of Heaven," "through Heaven," and others of a similar kind, in all of which "Heaven" is used in place of "God." In all such cases "Heaven" is written without the article; whereas, when "the heavens" in the ordinary sense occurs it is always written with the article; so that the expression "the Kingdom of Heaven" in its Hebrew form is *malkuth shamayim*, the latter word being written without the article.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The corresponding Aramaic is *malkutha dishemaja*, the emphatic form of the latter word (equivalent to the article in Hebrew) being due to the fact that there is no other form for it in Jewish-Aramaic (cp. Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, p. 75 [1898]).



While the idea of the divine rule on earth has its roots in the Old Testament, the actual expression "the Kingdom of Heaven" does not occur there; the nearest approach to it is found in 2 Chron. xiii. 8, where the expression "the Kingdom of Yahweh" is used in reference to the Davidic Kingdom.

According to Jewish usage the expression "the Kingdom of God," or "Heaven," has two distinct connotations. The first is what may be called the religious-ethical connotation; true believers in God who seek to do His will are subjects of the Heavenly King. In the Kingdom of God in Heaven the divine will is always obeyed by God's angelic subjects; but on earth, too, the Heavenly King has His subjects, so that there is a Kingdom of God on earth; but this is not to be understood in a territorial sense. Thus, in Ps. ciii. 19-22 we read: "The Lord hath established his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the Lord, ye angels of his. . . Bless the Lord, all ye his works, in all places of his dominion," the meaning of these last words being, wheresoever His rule is recognized; see also Ps. cxlv. 11-13.

The earthly Kingdom of God included, however, only those belonging to the Jewish race; but this must not be thought to be due to narrow national prejudice; for only those who acknowledged the divine sovereignty and its claims could have a right to call themselves subjects of that Kingdom, and this was done by the Jews only. Among the prophets, and in later days among the apocalyptic teachers, there were those who contemplated the time when the Gentiles would render obedience to the One and only God; but in pre-Christian times none but Jews and their proselytes worshipped God and acknowledged His sovereignty. It was, therefore, not national prejudice which taught that the Kingdom of God on earth included none but those of the Jewish race and religion.

This connotation of the Kingdom of God may be illustrated by one or two Rabbinical sayings which echo traditional thought. Rabbi Josua ben Korchah (early second century A.D.) urges that men should "accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven,"<sup>1</sup> *i.e.* that they should belong to the

<sup>1</sup> Mishna, *Berakoth* ii. 2.



Kingdom by keeping the commandments (cf. Matt. xi. 29, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me"). A contemporary of this Rabbi, Gamaliel II, uses the expression in a similar sense;<sup>1</sup> and the celebrated Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai, who lived soon after the destruction of Jerusalem, contrasted "the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven" with "the yoke of flesh and blood,"<sup>2</sup> i.e. the contrast between those who do the will of God, and those who are worldlings. Similarly in the Slavonic *Book of Enoch* xxxiv. 1 (early first century A.D.) it is said: "For I know the wickedness of men, that they will not bear the yoke which I have put upon them . . . , but will cast off my yoke and accept another, and deny me, the only God." Many other illustrations could be given, but these will suffice.<sup>3</sup> In all such passages the reality of the divine rule on earth is taken for granted, though the world does not recognize its presence; but when this present age comes to an end, then will appear the Kingdom of Heaven on earth in such wise that all flesh shall see it.

This leads us to the other connotation attaching to "the Kingdom of Heaven," namely, the eschatological one. Here the Kingdom, the speedy advent of which was looked for, lay in the future, in the "last times"; it would be heralded by natural phenomena of a terrifying kind, and by manifold horrors among men; this is all described as "the birthpangs of the Messiah," since the coming Kingdom was also to be the "Messianic Age."

During the last century B.C., or even a little earlier, and the first century A.D., the Jews looked for the sudden advent of the Kingdom in this sense, and believed that it might come at any time. This is reflected in the Gospels: Lk. ii. 25: ". . . Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel"; and Lk. xix. 11: ". . . they supposed that the Kingdom of God was immediately to appear," cp. also Mk. xv. 43. The leading figure at the advent was to be God's "Chosen

<sup>1</sup> *M. Berakoth* ii. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Kiddushin* 59 d.

<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Dalman, *op. cit.*, pp. 79 ff.; Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, pp. 165 ff. (1934).

One," or "the Anointed of the Lord," *i.e.* the Messiah, hence the expression "the days of the Messiah," in reference to the setting-up of God's Kingdom on earth, but in the sense of a dominion. The expectation was that in that time the re-establishment of the Israelite kingdom would be accomplished; the servitude of the people under the heathen yoke would come to an end, and the nation of the Jews would be supreme over all peoples; prosperity and well-being would be the lot of God's own people. One of the most interesting and instructive sources in which are reflected the hopes of the Jewish people is the pre-Christian prayer in the Jewish Liturgy (dating back, in part, to the third century B.C.),<sup>1</sup> called the *Shemoneh 'Ezreh* ("Eighteen Benedictions"); its importance demands that a few passages from it should be quoted:

"Look upon our affliction and plead our cause, and redeem us speedily for thy name's sake; for thou art a mighty Redeemer. Blessed art thou, O Lord, the Redeemer of Israel. Heal us, O Lord, and we shall be healed; save us, and we shall be saved; for thou art our praise. . . . Sound the great horn for our freedom; lift up the ensign to gather our exiles, and gather us from the four corners of the earth. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who gatherest the banished ones of thy people Israel. . . . Reign thou over us, O Lord, thou alone, in lovingkindness and tender mercy, and justify us in judgement. . . . And to Jerusalem, thy city, return in mercy, and dwell therein as thou hast spoken; rebuild it soon in our days as an everlasting building, and speedily set up therein the throne of David. Speedily cause the branch (*Žemach*, cp. Jer. xxiii. 5; Zech. iii. 8) of David, thy servant, to flourish, and let his horn be exalted by thy salvation, because we wait for thy salvation all the day. . . ."

The sobriety of expression in this prayer is in striking contrast to much that is said in other ancient Jewish writings about the temporal blessings which are to be the lot of the people in the Messianic times. Another point in this prayer

<sup>1</sup> This date is proved by the many parallels between various passages in the prayer and Ecclesiasticus (*circa* 190-180 B.C.); for details see the present writer's *The Jewish Background of the Christian Liturgy*, pp. 55 ff. (1925).

is of importance; it will have been noticed that the Ruler in that time to come is spoken of as the Almighty in one passage, and as the "branch" of David in another; this demands a word of explanation. The Kingdom of Heaven, synonymous with the Messianic times, was, according to the popular expectations, to be set up on this earth; on the other hand, both in the apocalyptic literature and elsewhere in early Jewish writings the Kingdom is thought of and described as belonging to the world to come, and as being ruled over by God alone. Two distinct sets of ideas are thus interlaced, one making the Messianic Kingdom an earthly rule, the other placing it in the realms above. In the prayer quoted, there is a modification of this in that the Kingdom is to be set up on this earth, and that God is to be the Ruler; the mention of Davidic rule is a concession to traditional expectations. We must see in this a striving to combine the transcendental conception of the Kingdom, held by the deeper thinkers, with the popular belief in a Messianic world-dominion, which, while brought about by divine intervention, would be ruled over by an earthly king, who would overcome all the nation's enemies, and inaugurate a time of both spiritual and temporal well-being.

In view of our Lord's teaching regarding the Kingdom, with which we shall deal later, it is most important to emphasize what must be called the high-water mark of pre-Christian Jewish teaching; that, namely, which places the Kingdom on this earth with the Almighty as King. No apology is, therefore, needed if we quote from two other prayers belonging to the earliest elements of the Jewish Liturgy; their dates are a little uncertain, but that they are pre-Christian does not admit of doubt. The first is that known as '*Alenu* (from its opening words, "It is meet for us"); it is too long to quote in full, but the salient passages are the following:

"... Therefore we hope in thee, O Lord our God, that we may speedily see the glory of Thy might; when Thou removest the abominations of the earth, and the idols shall be utterly cut off; when the world shall be set right in the Kingdom of the Almighty, and all the children of flesh shall call upon thy name; when Thou wilt turn unto Thyself all



the wicked of the earth, that all the inhabitants of the world may perceive and know that to Thee every knee must bow and fall down; and to the glory of Thy great name let them give honour. And let them take upon themselves the yoke of thy Kingdom, and do Thou reign over them for ever and ever. For the Kingdom is thine, and for ever and ever shalt Thou reign in glory." Let it also be pointed out that immediately preceding these petitions that God's will may be done on earth, there occur the words: "We worship the King of the kings of kings . . . the seat of His glory is in the heavens above; and the abode of His strength is in the far off heights. He is our God, and there is none other beside; truly our King, and there is none but He." When it is remembered that our Lord must have joined in this prayer daily, it is no stretch of the imagination to see a summary of it in the words: "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is in Heaven."

The other prayer is called *Kaddish* ("Sanctification," in reference to "His great name" being sanctified): "Magnified and hallowed be His great name in the world which He created according to His will. May He establish His Kingdom in your lifetime and in your days, and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel speedily and in a near time. And say ye, Amen."

In neither of these prayers is there any reference to a Davidic kingdom, or to the Messiah.

We have made one or two references to the Messiah; but it is necessary that the subject of the Messianic King should be considered in some detail.

In the Old Testament "the Messiah" as a technical term does not occur; but the belief that a human king was "the anointed of Yahweh," together with the conception of Yahweh as the Divine King, are found throughout the period of the monarchy (see, *e.g.*, Deut. xxxiii. 2-5; 2 Kgs. ix. 6). The conception of an ideal king of Davidic descent, being full of the spirit of Yahweh, was taught only by the prophets of the southern kingdom (*e.g.* Isa. xi. 1-5; Jer. xxiii. 5, 6; Ezek. xxxiv. 23, 24, xxxvii. 24, 25). In post-exilic times the hope of the Messiah is connected with the



name of Zerubbabel (Hag. ii. 23; Zech. iii. 8, vi. 12); and in some of the later Psalms a Messianic king is referred to.

These conceptions and beliefs form the foundation of all that is subsequently taught about the Messiah in the later Jewish literature. This we must now illustrate by some quotations. Just as there were, as we have seen, two sets of ideas regarding the Kingdom, so it is in regard to the person of the Messiah. They are incompatible with one another, as will be seen; but this cannot cause surprise, for it arises partly out of what are often arbitrary interpretations of Old Testament passages, and partly through the intermingling of ancient traditional ideas.

The belief in a Messiah who would be of the seed of David occurs in Ecclus. xlvii. 22: "He will give to Jacob a remnant, and to the house of David a root from him"; and in verse 8 of the Hymn of Praise which is inserted after li. 2 (it occurs only in the Hebrew), it is said: "Give thanks unto him that maketh a horn to sprout for the house of David." Owing to causes into which we cannot go now it was held in some circles that the Messiah would not be of the seed of David; thus in the *Test. of the xii Patriarchs* (circa 100 B.C.) the Messiah is represented as arising from the tribe of Judah (Judah xxiv. 1), but in Levi xviii. 2 ff. he is said to belong to the tribe of Levi.

In the *Psalms of Solomon*, on the other hand (circa 70-40 B.C.), the Messiah is again represented as of the seed of David (xvii. 5, 23-51). So, too, in the "Eagle Vision," in 2 (4) Esdras xii (circa A.D. 90, but it incorporates old material), mention is made of "the anointed one, whom the Most High hath kept unto the end of days, who shall spring up out of the seed of David."

Often, again, the Messiah, as an earthly king, is mentioned without any reference to his lineage; thus, *e.g.*, in Enoch xc. 37 (circa 100 B.C.) it is said of the Messiah, symbolized by a white bull, simply that he was "born," and that through his power he will transform all men. So, too, in 2 (4) Esdras vii. 28 ff. (circa A.D. 100) it is said that the Messiah will reign for four hundred years, and will then die; but nothing is said of his lineage. It is the same

in the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, of approximately the same date, where, in xxix. 3, it is said: "And it shall come to pass when all is accomplished that was to come to pass in those parts, that the Messiah will then begin to be revealed" (see also xxxix. 7-xl. 3; lxxii-lxxiii. 4); in all of these passages the Messiah, though an earthly ruler, is not spoken of as of the seed of David.

In the Targums, reflecting earlier thought, the Messiah is represented as an earthly ruler, and is spoken of as "King Messiah," and not infrequently his lineage is mentioned; in the Jerusalem Targum to Gen. xlix. 10 (*circa* middle of the seventh century A.D.), *e.g.*, it is said: "How beautiful is King Messiah who will arise from the house of Judah, and fight against his enemies and slay kings"; while in the Targum of Onkelos to Num. xxiv. 17 (of much earlier date) we read: "A mighty king from the house of Jacob shall reign, and great shall Israel's Messiah become."

These few quotations, of many which could be given, illustrate one aspect of the belief concerning the person of the Messiah. We must refer next to the conceptions which represent the Messiah as superhuman. Here we come to a subject of great importance, for which the starting-point is Dan. vii. 13, 14: "I saw in the night visions, and, behold, there came with the clouds of heaven one like unto a son of man (בֶּרֶךְ אֱנָשׁ *bar 'enāsh*), and he came even to the Ancient of Days, and they brought him near before him. And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a Kingdom, that all the people, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his Kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Whether the expression "a son of man" is to be understood as referring to an individual or as symbolic of the faithful remnant of Israel, there can be no doubt that he, or they, are thought of as supernatural<sup>1</sup> (see further on this below). This is also the case in that

<sup>1</sup> This is not the opinion of all scholars; those who hold that "one like unto a son of man" is merely a symbol for Israel naturally deny the supernatural character of the "son of man." But as Nathaniel Schmidt well points out: "A symbolic representation of 'a more humane régime,' 'ein Menschheitsideal,' savours more of modern humanitarian ideas than of the concrete conceptions of Semitic antiquity" (*Encycl. Bibl.* iv. 4710).

part of the *Book of Enoch* called "the Parables" (xxxvii-lxxi, belonging to the earlier half of the first century B.C.); thus, in xlvi. 1 ff., it is said: ". . . And with him was another being whose countenance had the appearance of a man, and his face was full of graciousness, like one of the holy angels. And I asked the angel who went with me and showed me all the hidden things, concerning that Son of Man, Who he was, and whence he was, and why he went with the Head of Days? And he answered and said unto me: This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness, with whom dwelleth righteousness, and who revealeth all the treasures of that which is hidden; because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him, and whose lot hath the pre-eminence before the Lord of Spirits in uprightness for ever. . . ." Reference is made to the Son of Man, who is also called "the Elect One," in a number of other passages (xlvi. 2 ff., xlix. 2 ff., lxi. 5 ff., lxii. 1 ff., lxxi. 14 ff.); in all of which he is clearly represented as supernatural; that both these terms are used for the Messiah does not admit of doubt.<sup>1</sup>

Once more, in the "Vision of the Man from the sea," i.e. the Messiah, in 2 (4) Esdras xiii., the Seer says: "And after this I beheld, and, lo, all they which were gathered together to fight against him were sore afraid, and yet durst fight. And, lo, as he saw the assault of the multitude that came, he neither lifted his hand, nor held spear, nor any instrument of war; but only I saw how that he sent out of his mouth as it had been a flood of fire, and out of his lips a flaming breath, and out of his tongue he cast forth sparks of the storm. And these were all mingled together; the flood of fire, the flaming breath, and the great storm; and fell upon the assault of the multitude which was prepared to fight, and burned them up every one, so that upon a sudden of an innumerable multitude nothing was to be perceived, but only dust of ashes and smell of smoke" (verses 8-11).

Further quotations are unnecessary. It is, thus, clear that in the century or so preceding and that following the

<sup>1</sup> See Charles, *The Book of Enoch, or 1 Enoch*, pp. 85 ff. (1912).

beginning of the Christian era varying conceptions were held concerning the Kingdom of Heaven and the Messiah. ✓ Speaking quite generally, one may say that in regard to the former, materialistic ideas, on the one hand, spiritual ones, on the other, held sway; and with regard to the Messiah, an earthly king, on the one hand, and a supernatural personality, on the other, was conceived of.

We turn now to the Gospels, and to the use there of the expression "the Kingdom of Heaven," and of the Messianic title "Son of Man." An initial difficulty is presented here by the variations in the Synoptic Gospels regarding the expressions used in connexion with the announcing or preaching of the Kingdom of Heaven, the difficulty, namely, of deciding what expressions, in their Aramaic equivalents, were used by our Lord. For example, the expression "to preach the good tidings" of the Kingdom of God (*εὐαγγελίσασθαι*) in Lk. iv. 43, cp. xvi. 16, occurs in these two passages alone, and not in the parallel passages in the other Gospels. In the same way, the noun "good tidings" (*εὐαγγέλιον*) occurs but rarely in reference to the Kingdom. Dalman is probably right in saying that neither the verb nor the noun was used by our Lord, but that they arose as technical terms, either with or without "the Kingdom of God," within the early Christian community.<sup>1</sup> As he points out, the corresponding Aramaic word (*bassar*) does not contain the idea of "good" tidings which the Greek does; thus, when the Kingdom of Heaven was first proclaimed, so far from the idea of joy being connected with it, the words are, "*Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand*" (Matth. iv. 17, cp. Mk. i. 15; Lk. xxiv. 47; Acts v. 31). The expression which our Lord used for the proclaiming of the Kingdom was more likely to have been the Aramaic equivalent of *κηρύσσειν* ("to preach"), cp. Mk. iii. 14; Matth. x. 7; Lk. x. 9.

As to the coming of the Kingdom, the following passages illustrate the expressions used by our Lord: "The Kingdom of Heaven *is at hand*," or "hath drawn near" (Matth. iv. 17

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 84. The various expressions used by our Lord in connexion with the Kingdom of Heaven have been admirably gathered together by Dalman, to whom we express our indebtedness.



and elsewhere); "When ye see these things coming to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God *is nigh*" (Lk. xxi. 31); ". . . then is the Kingdom of God *come upon you* (ἐφθασεν, Matth. xii. 28); "thy Kingdom *come*" (ἐλθάτω), with which cp. Mk. xi. 10: "Blessed is the Kingdom that *cometh*" (ἡ ἐρχομένη βασιλεία), not, however, spoken by our Lord. In Lk. xix. 11 it is said: ". . . they supposed that the Kingdom of God was immediately to *appear*"; but, again, our Lord does not utter these words, and the expression "appear" in the reference to the Kingdom does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament; but in Mk. ix. 1 our Lord says: "There be some here of them that stand by, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they *see* the Kingdom of God come with power," Lk. ix. 27 omits "with power"; both passages must probably be understood in the sense of Matth. x. 23: "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come." In this connexion we have also the expression "*looking for*," or hoping for, the Kingdom of God (Mk. xv. 43; Lk. xxiii. 51), but here the expression is used by the evangelists, not by our Lord.

The necessity of being *worthy* of belonging to the Kingdom is taught by our Lord in the words: "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk. ix. 62, cp. xiv. 35). The Kingdom of God is clearly meant when our Lord speaks of "those who are accounted worthy to attain to that world, and the resurrection from the dead" (Lk. xx. 35, cp. 2 Thess. i. 5); but it will be noted that in this last passage the Kingdom is not thought of as being on this earth, which we are more especially thinking of now.

The worthy are those who *seek* the Kingdom, which our Lord bids all men do: "Seek ye his Kingdom, and these things shall be added unto you" (Lk. xii. 31; Matth. vi. 33 adds "and his righteousness"), and we recall the words of Matth. vii. 7, 8: "Seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you . . ."; that the reference is to the Kingdom is clear from v. 3. The same teaching is contained

in the parable of the merchant seeking goodly pearls (Matth. xiii. 45, 46).

All men are called upon or *invited* (καλεῖν) to enter into the Kingdom; this is brought out especially in the parable of the Wedding Feast (Matth. xxii. 1-14, cp. Lk. xiv. 16, 17, 24, and see also 1 Thess. ii. 12, "who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory").

For those who are worthy it is said that the Kingdom is "*prepared*"; in Matth. xxv. 34 it is said: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world"; and in Matth. xx. 23 it is said that the Kingdom "hath been prepared of my Father" for those who are worthy of it (cp. also Matth. xxii. 4, 8; Lk. xiv. 17). In the passage just quoted there is mention made of *inheriting* the Kingdom, cp. Matth. xix. 29; hence the further expression of "the sons of the Kingdom" (Matth. xiii. 38); from Matth. viii. 12 it is to be gathered that these are primarily the Jews.

Again, to those who are worthy it is said that the Kingdom is *given*; see, e.g., Lk. xii. 32: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom" (cp. Matth. vii. 7, xxi. 43; Lk. xi. 9); and those who are worthy are spoken of as receiving, or *accepting*, the Kingdom, Mk. x. 14; Lk. viii. 11, xviii. 17; and they, therefore, *enter* into the Kingdom, an expression which is frequently used, but more especially in reference to those who are not worthy of entering it (see Matth. v. 20, vii. 21, xviii. 3, xix. 23, 24, together with the parallel passages, and elsewhere). But of the worthy it is said that the Kingdom *belongs* to them as their own: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matth. v. 3, cp. xix. 14). In regard to the unworthy, on the other hand, we have such expressions as *casting out* from the Kingdom (Matth. xxii. 13; Lk. xiii. 28), and being *shut out* (Matth. xxv. 10; Lk. xiii. 25).

Three other expressions used in connexion with the Kingdom remain to be considered. (1) In several passages reference is made to "*reclining*," i.e. sitting down to meat, and "*eating bread*," and "*eating and drinking*," in the

Kingdom of Heaven; thus, in Matth. viii. 11 (cp. Lk. xiii. 28): "And I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down (*i.e.* recline) with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven." Again, in Lk. xiv. 15 (though these are not the words of our Lord): "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." And, once more, in Matth. xxvi. 29 (cp. Mk. xiv. 25; Lk. xxii. 18) our Lord says: "I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom"; and in Lk. xxii. 15, 16 it is said: ". . . with desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say unto you, I will not eat it, until it be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God."

Although our Lord echoes in some of these passages old-world traditional ideas, it is difficult to believe that He meant literal eating and drinking; in Oriental speech both are often used in a figurative sense, and this is also the case in the Old Testament; an interesting instance occurs in Ezek. ii. 8 ff.: "But thou, son of man, hear what I say unto thee . . . open thy mouth, and eat that I give thee. And when I looked, behold, an hand was put forth unto me; and, lo, a roll of a book was therein. . . . And he said unto me, Son of man, eat this roll, and go, speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat the roll. . . . Then did I eat it; and it was in my mouth as honey for sweetness." And for an example of drinking being used figuratively we have Ps. lxxv. 8 (Hebr. 9): "For in the hand of Yahweh there is a cup with fermented wine, full of spices, and he poureth out therefrom even the dregs; all the wicked of the earth shall suck<sup>1</sup> them out." See also Isa. lxx. 13.

Our Lord uses both words in a figurative sense in Matth. v. 6 (Lk. vi. 21): "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."

(2) The second is contained in Lk. xvi. 16: ". . . from that time the gospel of the Kingdom of God is preached,

<sup>1</sup> "Shall drink" is a marginal gloss which has found its way into the present text.

and every man entereth violently into it," cf. Matth. xi. 12: ". . . the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force." The form of the text which lay behind both of these texts probably dealt simply with the treatment of the Kingdom of Heaven, *i.e.* those who belonged to it, from the time of John the Baptist. St. Luke interpreted it as referring to the way in which the multitudes flocked to our Lord and followed Him. The Matthæan interpretation, however, represents, according to Dalman,<sup>1</sup> a closer approximation to the original meaning of the words. On the basis of what he holds, with a high degree of probability, to be the Aramaic form of the words, he explains the passage as referring, obviously, to the period in which the Kingdom was inaugurated, *i.e.* from the time of the imprisonment of John the Baptist; it was from this time, he points out further, that the Kingdom suffered violence, not, however, in the sense that men forced themselves into it, but on the part of the Jewish religious leaders; the words "and men of violence take it by force" mean not that the Kingdom is violently taken possession of, but that they who belong to the Kingdom are maltreated.

(3) Then, lastly, we have the passage Lk. xvii. 20, 21: ". . . The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or there! for lo, the Kingdom of God is within you" (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν). It is this last expression with which we are specially concerned. It will be noticed that it stands in contrast to, "cometh not with observation," and this would suggest that the meaning of "within you" is that the Kingdom, *i.e.* its nature and essence, is hidden in the hearts of men, and only appears in their manner of life. The expression can thus be illustrated by what is said about the hidden seed in the parable of the Sower (Lk. viii. 5 ff.), by the grain of mustard seed hidden in the garden (Lk. xiii. 19), and by the leaven hidden in three measures of meal (Lk. xiii. 21). This meaning of ἐντὸς ὑμῶν represents, as Dalman shows,<sup>2</sup> the corresponding Aramaic. If the meaning were "among you," or "in the midst of you" (so the Syriac Versions and R.V. marg.), we

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 115 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 119.



should expect ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν, in accordance with Lucan usage, e.g. "I am in the midst of you (ἐν μέσῳ ὑμῶν) as he that serveth" (xxii. 27), see also ii. 46, viii. 7, x. 3, xxii. 55, xxiv. 36; Acts i. 15, ii. 22, xxvii. 21.

In summing up all that our Lord taught about the Kingdom of Heaven, Dalman<sup>1</sup> rightly points out that not only was the content of the conception of the Kingdom, which formed the central point of His teaching, new and original, but the same is true also of the linguistic usage in regard to it. While our Lord makes use of an expression—the Kingdom of Heaven—which in its origin belonged to the religious form of speech of the Jews, He transforms and exalts its meaning, and shows that its nature and essence were something very different from anything that the Jews had ever dreamed of.

One thing more demands a few words. We referred above to Dan. vii. 13, 14, where the expression "a son of man" is used of the Messiah, as well as to various passages in the *Book of Enoch*, where a similar expression is used. One cannot speak about the Kingdom of Heaven, in our Lord's sense, without some consideration of the title "Son of Man" which He, as the Central Figure in the Kingdom, applies to Himself.

Apart from its poetic use for "a man" in the ordinary sense, the expression "son of man" (*ben-'adam*) occurs with great frequency in the book of Ezekiel; here, though its meaning is simply that of a human being, it is in the nature of a title. This is true also of its use in Dan. viii. 17 (belonging to the Hebrew part of the book).

The Aramaic equivalent (*bar 'enash*) is met with for the first time in the Aramaic portion of the book of Daniel, in vii. 13, where it means that he who "came with the clouds of heaven," was, so far as his appearance was concerned, like a man in the ordinary sense of the word. It is from this passage that the writer of the "Parables" in the *Book of Enoch* borrowed the expression "son of man"; but he developed it; for while in Daniel it is indefinite, like "a son of man," in the "Parables" it is used definitely of

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 113.

“the Son of Man,” so that it is appropriate to use capital letters. Both writers, however, we maintain represent the person referred to as supernatural. In the *Book of Enoch*, however, the *title* is far more significant; as a definite personal title it is in the “Parables” that it appears for the first time in literature; the characteristics and functions of “the Son of Man,” as there portrayed are, therefore, important, and call for some illustrations. In li. 3 it is related that he sits on the throne of God, and utters all wisdom: “And the Elect One shall in those days sit on my throne, and his mouth shall pour forth all the secrets of wisdom and counsel; for the Lord of Spirits hath given them to him and hath glorified him.” The divine throne is also his throne, as it is said in lxii. 3: “And there shall stand up in that day all the kings and all the mighty, and the exalted, and those who hold the earth; and they shall see and recognize how he sits on the throne of his glory . . .”; similarly in verse 5 and in lxix. 27, 29. He chooses the righteous as his own: “For in those days the Elect One shall arise, and he shall choose the righteous and holy from among them; for the day has drawn nigh that they should be saved” (li. 5<sup>a</sup> 2). There will be joy in heaven and earth when he appears: “And the faces of all the angels in heaven shall be lighted up with joy; and the earth shall rejoice, and the righteous shall dwell upon it, and the elect shall walk thereon” (li. 4, 5).

When he appears, for he has been hidden with the Almighty, he will have dominion over all the earth, and the mighty shall worship him:

“And the kings and the mighty and all who possess the earth shall bless and glorify and extol him who rules over all, who was hidden. For from the beginning the Son of Man was hidden, and the Most High preserved him in the presence of His might, and revealed him to the elect. . . . And all the kings, and the mighty, and the exalted, and those who rule the earth, shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and set their hope upon that Son of Man, and petition him, and supplicate for mercy at his hands” (lxii. 6-9).

When the Son of Man comes he will judge the world: "And he sat on the throne of his glory, and the sum of judgement was given unto the Son of Man, and he caused the sinners to pass away and be destroyed from off the face of the earth, and those who have led the world astray" (lxix. 27, cp. xli. 9). Finally, and perhaps most important of all, he is the embodiment of righteousness:

"This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness, with whom dwelleth righteousness, and who revealeth all the treasures of that which is hidden; because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him, and whose lot hath the pre-eminence before the Lord of Spirits in uprightness for ever" (xlvi. 3).

That the writer of the "Parables" used the title "Son of Man" in reference to the Messiah, for whom he has, moreover, no other designation, does not admit of doubt. But, as Dalman has shown, this use is quite exceptional; among the Jews the expression was never used as a current designation of the Messiah.<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospels the Greek *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου* (lit. "the Son of the Man"; without the definite article it would be "the Son of a man") is the inexact equivalent of the Aramaic *bar 'enasha*, or *bar nasha*; it is an expression which cannot be adequately rendered in Greek. According to Dalman,<sup>2</sup> the Aramaic form was unknown in the earlier Jewish-Aramaic literature; and our Lord's application of the term to Himself was therefore new.

In the Synoptic Gospels the title "the Son of Man" is used by our Lord alone; it is not used elsewhere in the New Testament excepting where our Lord's own words are quoted (John xii. 34, cp. iii. 13, 14; and Acts vii. 56, cp. Lk. xxii. 69). Nowhere is there any explanation given as to the meaning of the title or the reason of our Lord's use of it; but very significant is Matth. xvi. 13-15, where "the Son of Man" is shown to be equivalent to the Son of God: ". . . Who do men say that the Son of Man is? . . . And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Our Lord's words which follow show that St. Peter had divined the truth; it had been revealed to

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 199 ff.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 191 ff.

him from Heaven. The words, "Who do men say that the Son of Man is?" seem to imply that our Lord had already applied the title to Himself, and this is borne out by the fact that the first time (so far as we know) <sup>1</sup> He used it (Mk. ii. 10, cf. Lk. v. 24), was when "many were gathered together." But to the disciples and to the people generally the meaning of the title as applied by our Lord to Himself must have been an enigma; those conversant with the Scriptures would naturally have recalled Dan. vii. 13, others would, likely enough, have recalled its use in the *Book of Enoch*, but they could not possibly have thought that our Lord intended to apply to Himself the title in the sense in which it is used in those writings. There was nothing at all to suggest this; both to the disciples and to the multitudes our Lord was, as yet, nothing more than a wonderful man who taught strikingly, and healed people; it did not enter their minds that this could be He who "came with the clouds of heaven," the Elect One who sat on the throne of God. All the more striking, therefore, is the way in which St. Peter, and presumably with him the nearest disciples, came to the knowledge of what our Lord meant in applying it to Himself. To them the significance of the title was vouchsafed at an early period of our Lord's ministry; but to the rest it was not until the end that He revealed it: "But from henceforth shall the Son of Man be seated at the right hand of the power of God. And they all said, Art thou then the Son of God? And he said unto them, Ye say that I am" (Lk. xxii. 69, 70).

\* \* \* \* \*

With the difficult and controversial subject of what our Lord meant by His Second Coming we have not dealt here; no doubt when there are so many parables of the Kingdom it would have been appropriate enough; but a proper treatment of the subject would involve discussing Jewish eschatology and the apocalyptic literature; these would have taken us too far away from the subject in hand.

<sup>1</sup> It is impossible to know how far the evangelists have given the details of their records chronologically; but this certainly seems to have taken place early in our Lord's ministry.



PARABLES OF THE MYSTERIES OF THE  
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN



## LECTURE III

### THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

[Matth. xiii. 1-9, 18-23; Mk. iv. 1-9, 13-20; Lk. viii. 4-8, 11-15]

WE are so accustomed to read this parable with its interpretation that we are perhaps apt to miss the fact that it must have sounded pointless to those who heard it without any explanation. It is small wonder that even the inner circle of disciples failed to see any point in it. It was not until Christ explained what He intended to teach by it that, presumably, the disciples realized that it dealt with one of the mysteries <sup>1</sup> of the Kingdom of Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

It is, however, not immediately apparent in what sense the parable contains a mystery of the Kingdom of Heaven. True, it is not, as is the case with the parables which follow, directly concerned with the Kingdom;<sup>3</sup> nevertheless, it does set forth something which explained to the disciples—and it was for them specifically that it was uttered (Matth. xiii. 11)—a fact which had been difficult for them to under-

<sup>1</sup> "Mystery" (*μυστήριον*) = a secret withheld from the generality of men. In a Hebraized form the word occurs frequently in later Rabbinical literature; one of the great mysteries here was the time when the beginning of the days of the Messiah would begin (Strack-Billerbeck, i. 659).

<sup>2</sup> Dodd does not believe that our Lord offered any explanatory words on the parable; it cannot be denied that "the interpretation is not consistent with itself, and does not really fit the parable"; he regards the interpretation as "a striking example of the way in which the Church re-interpreted sayings and parables of Jesus to suit its changing needs" (*op. cit.*, p. 181). We do not for a moment deny that such re-interpretations are to be discerned in connexion with some of the parables; but we cannot get away from the conviction that in some cases, at any rate, these re-interpretations are based on some actual explanatory words of our Lord. That the interpretation is not consistent with itself, and does not really fit the parable, does not necessarily contradict this, for it may reflect what was uttered by our Lord, though inadequately recorded by the evangelist. For ourselves, we feel that there is more in the parable than Dodd's interpretation allows for (see *The Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 180 ff.); space forbids our quoting his argument and conclusion.

<sup>3</sup> In Luke this parable stands quite isolated.

stand, viz.: the disciples had been the constant companions of our Lord, they had journeyed with Him in various parts of the country, they had daily heard and been convinced by His teaching, and they had observed how the multitudes had hung upon His words; they, and not they alone, believed that He had come to proclaim and inaugurate the Kingdom of God, as they understood it; the multitudes believed this too; they were looking for the coming of the Kingdom, and by their constant gathering about Christ they obviously expected that He would take action and set up the Kingdom. But their expectations were disappointed, nothing decisive happened; though still following Him and listening to His teaching, the masses were sceptical, sometimes inimical (cp. Matth. xiii. 54-58; John viii. 59), even John the Baptist and his disciples had their doubts (Matth. xi. 2 ff.; Lk. vii. 18 ff.); above all, the religious leaders, the scribes and Pharisees, who might well have been expected to be impressed by Christ's teaching, showed ever-increasing antagonism. Now, to the inner circle of the disciples, upon whom the person of our Lord had made such a profound impression, and whose confidence in Him was overwhelming, this attitude on the part of the mass of His hearers was incomprehensible. Why was it that Christ's announcement of the Kingdom and His teaching on the word of God had been so ineffective? The explanation<sup>1</sup> is given in the parable of the Sower.<sup>2</sup> In the illustrative picture which Christ presents He shows that what from the nature of the case is to be expected, inevitably comes to pass; that is so obvious that to the multitude the parable must have appeared

<sup>1</sup> Numerous as parables are in Rabbinical literature, it is comparatively rarely that an explanation is given.

<sup>2</sup> In the "Ezra Apocalypse" (2 (4) *Esdra*) there is a passage strongly reminiscent of this parable, so far as its outward form is concerned: "For as the husbandman soweth much seed upon the ground, and planteth many trees, and yet not all that is sown shall come up in due season, neither shall all that is planted take root: even so they that are sown in the world shall not all be saved" (viii. 41). Although this Jewish apocalypse, belonging in its present form to the beginning of the second century A.D., has some obvious Christian interpolations, it is not necessary to suppose that the writer was indebted to the parable of the Sower for this passage. It is more likely that the idea of the comparison contained in each was traditional. The Hebrew word for "seed" (*zera'*) means both the seed of the field and human offspring, so that the idea of the comparison would have been readily suggested.



pointless. But to the inner circle of disciples, though they, too, clearly did not see the point of it (see Mk. iv. 13), there could be no doubt that it contained a hidden meaning, especially when they heard the concluding words: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Hence their request to know what the parable meant. Christ's reply, in effect, was, that just as in the natural world that happens which is to be expected, so, too, in the spiritual world; so that there need be no cause for perplexity on the part of the disciples at the unresponsive attitude of the various types of hearers among the multitudes. Though it is not said that the disciples' perplexity was set at rest, this was quite evidently the case, for by their presence with our Lord day by day they had again and again seen and heard illustrations of what He had said in the parable and in its explanation. Thus:

The seed by the wayside represents those who have heard the word of God, but reject it (Matth. xiii. 19).<sup>1</sup> The hardness of the soil through being trodden upon aptly pictures the unimpressionable and obstinate mind, and the heart hardened by self-love and egotism. The disciples can hardly have failed to recognize who were meant: those upon whom the teaching of Christ had from the first been wholly without effect were the scribes and Pharisees; the disciples had seen how Pharisaic self-righteousness had been offended at the sight of publicans and sinners consulting with Christ (Matth. ix. 10 ff.; Mk. ii. 15, 16; Lk. xv. 2), and at Him and the disciples for not washing their hands before eating (Matth. xv. 2; Mk. vii. 1 ff.; Lk. xi. 38); they had seen how the narrow fanaticism of the Pharisees had fired resentment against Christ in the matter of Sabbath observance (Matth. xii. 2 ff., 10; Mk. ii. 23 ff.; Lk. vi. 1 ff.); how the Pharisees had accused Him of casting out demons by Beelzebub (Matth. xii. 24 ff.; Mk. iii. 22; Lk. xi. 15);

<sup>1</sup> All three evangelists "identify the seed sown with the hearers who receive it; in no case are they the soil into which it falls. οὗτος here stands for a person, not the seed (τὸ ἐσπαρμένον); since that which grows from the seed is the human character, the seed represents the germ of it, and the soil the previous state of the heart (ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ). The evil one does not snatch away the teaching (which may remain in the memory, and even convince the intellect), but the living results of it" (McNeile, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, p. 193 [1915]).

how they had longed to lay hold of Him because of His teaching, but feared the multitudes, who took Him for a prophet (Matth. xxi. 46); and how they had sought to "ensnare him in his talk" (Matth. xxii. 15; Mk. xii. 13; Lk. xx. 20). This and much else the disciples had seen and heard; how could they have failed to perceive that Christ was referring to the scribes and Pharisees when He spoke of those who heard the word of the Kingdom, but could not understand it? <sup>1</sup>

A short digression on the subject of the Pharisees may be permitted here. The Synoptists, and especially the first Gospel, contain some vehement denunciations against the Pharisees, and rightly so, for it is quite evident that there were bad Pharisees, legalistic Pharisees in the worst sense of the word, who clearly had the upper hand among the people at the beginning of the Christian period. But to regard *all* the Pharisees as antagonistic to Christ, and to say that Pharisaism as a system was wholly bad, would be not only unjust, but would ignore a good deal of evidence contained in the Gospels. That our Lord was on friendly terms with many of the Pharisees may be seen, *e.g.*, by His presence at a feast in a Pharisee's house (Lk. vii. 36 ff.); by the friendly warning given to Him by the Pharisees who told Him of Herod's intent to kill Him (Lk. xiii. 31); by His partaking of a feast given by one of the rulers of the Pharisees; so impressed by His words was one of the company on this occasion that he said: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Lk. xiv. 15). It must also be remembered that there are numerous other passages in which are preserved arguments and the like between Christ and the Pharisees which are not of an unfriendly character, and which point to a great deal of intercourse, a fact which would be inexplicable had there been per-

<sup>1</sup> To modern ears the words, "then cometh the evil one (Mk. 'Satan,' Lk. 'the devil'), and snatcheth away . . .," may sound strange in the mouth of our Lord; but it must be realized that this merely illustrates the Jewish method of putting things concretely, the preference for concrete rather than abstract expression. In Rabbinical literature, however, "the evil (one)," *ὁ πονηρός*, is not equivalent to Satan.

manent antagonism between Christ and *all* the Pharisees (see Matth. xxii. 34-45; Mk. ii. 16, 17; Lk. v. 17, xvii. 20, xix. 39, 40; John viii. 12-20). It must also be recalled what is said about the Pharisee, Nicodemus, in John iii. 1, 2; vii. 50, 51; and Joseph of Arimathæa was also a Pharisee; for he is spoken of as a "Councillor" (βουλευτής) in Mk. xv. 43, Lk. xxiii. 50; and in verse 51 he is said to be a member of the Sanhedrin, who had "not consented" to the resolution which condemned Christ.<sup>1</sup> These facts make it clear that not all the Pharisees were antagonistic to our Lord; and there is a passage in the fourth Gospel, showing the tendency to divisions among them, which is significant: "Some, therefore, of the Pharisees said, This man is not from God, because he keepeth not the Sabbath. But others said, How can a man that is a sinner do such signs? And there was a division among them" (John ix. 16). The Pharisees rebuked by our Lord were a hypocritical section only, and it is interesting to see how this type is held up to scorn in the Talmud; it is there said (*Sota* 22*b*) that there were seven types of Pharisee: first the "shoulder Pharisee," who wears his good deeds on his shoulder, as it were, so that all the world can see and admire them; then there was the "wait-a-bit Pharisee," who says, in effect, "Wait a bit until I have done the good deed waiting to be done" (and of course, never does it!); the third one was the "bruised Pharisee," who runs up against a wall and bruises himself rather than look at a woman; fourthly, there was the "pestle Pharisee," who walks with his head down in mock humility, like a pestle in a mortar; then comes the "reckon-it-up Pharisee," who is ever counting up the good deeds that he has done, in order to see if they are sufficient to counterbalance the evil ones; sixthly, there was the "God-fearing Pharisee," who took Job for his pattern; and the last type was the "God-loving Pharisee," who, like Abraham, the friend of God, really loved his heavenly Father.<sup>2</sup> This Rabbinical evidence is very significant.

<sup>1</sup> Ever since the reign of Salome (Alexandra), 75/4-67/6 B.C. the Sanhedrin was composed exclusively of Pharisees, who at that time gained permanent supremacy over the Sadducees.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in the *Jewish Encycl.*, ix. 665 *b*.



We return to the Parable. "And he that was sown upon the rocky places, this is he that heareth the word, and straightway with joy receiveth it; yet hath he not root in himself,<sup>1</sup> but endureth for a while; and when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, straightway he stumbleth" (Matth. xiii. 20, 21). The mention here of "rocky places" as existing in a cornfield is no mere figure; it is the fact that in Palestine the underlying limestone rock constantly crops up in the most unexpected places, being concealed by the scantiest covering of soil. There is just enough soil to permit a sickly sprout to appear; but not sufficient to nourish the root, so that the growth soon withers away and dies.

There were certain groups among Christ's listeners who by their eager and excited acceptance of His words about the Kingdom appeared to give promise of loyal adherence, but who, for various reasons, fell away. Here it must be remarked that the mention of tribulation and persecution because of the word, which occurs in both Matthew and Mark, reads strangely. At a time when the multitudes were pressing around our Lord to hear His words and to receive benefits from Him their numbers would have been so great that there could hardly have been any danger of persecution; and, moreover, who would have been the persecutors? Assuredly none but certain sections of the Pharisees; but the Pharisees did not dare lay hands on Christ just because of the multitudes (Matth. xxi. 46; Mk. xi. 18; Lk. xix. 47, 48), and similarly even later (Matth. xxvi. 5; Mk. xiv. 2; Lk. xxii. 6); the mention of persecution at this stage is, thus, premature; it can hardly be doubted that it is a later addition referring to subsequent persecutions on account of the Christian Gospel. This view is strengthened by the fact that in the parallel passage in the third Gospel no mention is made of tribulation and persecution; there it is said: "And these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away" (Lk. viii. 13). This mention of "temptation" is very significant, as will be seen.

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Eccles. xl. 15: "The root of the godless is upon a rocky crag" (Hebrew).



To whom, then, did the seed sown on rocky places correspond? What types of men must immediately have been suggested to the minds of the disciples? Two types, if we are not mistaken. It must be remembered that the period of our Lord's life with which we are dealing was that of the Galilæan ministry (see Matth. iv. 12; Mk. i. 14, 15; Lk. iv. 14, 15); what is said in Matth. xiii. 20, 21 about receiving the word with joy, enduring but for a while, and then stumbling, describes exactly the easily moved Galilæan folk. Highly impressionable, but superficial and unstable, the people of Galilee were of mixed race; as early as the eighth century B.C. aliens from the east were settled in the cities of Samaria by the King of Assyria (ii. Kgs. xvii. 24); in later days there was an influx of Phœnician, Ituræan, and Greek elements (cp. i Macc. v. 15, "Galilee of the Gentiles," see also verses 23, 45 ff.; so, too, in Isa. ix. 1 [viii. 23 in Hebr.], quoted in Matth. iv. 15),<sup>1</sup> a racial intermixture owing to which the Galilæans were looked down upon by the Jews of the south (see Matth. xxvi. 69; John i. 46; Acts ii. 7).

This was the first type; and the disciples, being for the most part Galilæans, would have known from personal experience the impulsive emotionalism and unreliability of their fellow-countrymen, and have been the first to perceive the aptness of our Lord's comparison.

But there was, we believe, another type, though composed also largely of Galilæans; and perhaps this type was that more especially in the mind of our Lord. We mean those who had come under the influence of apocalyptic visionaries. This is confessedly a matter of some uncertainty, and while not wishing to dogmatize, we cannot but feel that there are some considerations which lend colour to this supposition. The apocalyptic movement, though originating long before, was in full vogue at the beginning of the Christian era. It is likely enough that the apocalyptic writings were reserved for "such as be wise among the people" (Ezra Apoc. [2 (4) Esdr.] xiv. 46, cp. verse 26, and see also Dan. xii. 10),

<sup>1</sup> Josephus speaks of Galilee being "encompassed with so many nations of foreigners" (*Bell. Jud.* iii. 41).

but there can be no shadow of doubt that the apocalyptists themselves moved among the people and influenced large sections of them; we read, *e.g.*, in the Apoc. of Bar. lxxvii. 1 ff.: "And I, Baruch, went thence and came to the people, and assembled them together from the greatest to the least, and said unto them . . ." (see also the Secrets of Enoch lxvii. 1; Ezra Apoc. [2 (4) Esdr.] xii. 40-45, xiv. 13, and elsewhere). The particular points of their varied teaching which concern us were their reiterated prophecies of the coming of the Messiah in the near future, and the setting-up of his kingdom whereby Israel would be redeemed from their oppressors and rule over them. At the time with which we are dealing, the Jews had been, and were, suffering under the Roman yoke, so that the hopes and expectations held out to them by the apocalyptists came home with special force. When, therefore, Christ appeared, saying: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand" (Mk. i. 15), it is easy to understand with what tense eagerness they awaited developments. In the apocalyptic prophecies the elements which appealed with special force were those which spoke of deliverance from the tyranny of oppressors and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom, whereby the Jews would become the dominant power in the world; thus, *e.g.*, in the Ezra Apoc. (2 [4] Esdr.) xii. 32-34 it is said: "this is the anointed one . . . and he shall come and speak unto them [*i.e.* the Romans] and reprove them for their wickedness and their unrighteousness. . . . For at the first he shall set them alive in his judgment, and when he hath reproved them, he shall destroy them. For the rest of my people shall he deliver with mercy, those that have been preserved throughout my borders, and he shall make them joyful . . ."; see also Apoc. of Bar. xxxix. 1-3, and in many other places. It was these hopes which filled the minds of the followers of the apocalyptists: deliverance from the enemy, and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom. But they waited in vain for these things to come about. Thus the glowing enthusiasm with which they had at first welcomed Christ, and the joy wherewith they had received Him, soon cooled down and "endured but a short time."

It may, therefore, be claimed that there is some justification for believing that the seed "sown upon the rocky places" was recognized by the disciples as depicting both the fickle Galilæan folk in general, but more especially those whose minds were full of apocalyptic expectations.

"And he that was sown among the thorns, this is he that heareth the word; and the care of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matth. xiii. 22; Mk. iv. 18, 19, where it is added after "riches": "and the lusts of other things entering in"; Lk. viii. 14 has: ". . . these are they that have heard, and as they go on their way they are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection").

We fully realize the danger of fanciful interpretation of our Lord's parabolic teaching, and of reading into His words meanings which they were not intended to convey. But inasmuch as in the two preceding cases definite types or classes of hearers were indicated, the presumption is that this was intended here too. In this third case the failure is due not to hardness of the soil, nor yet to its insufficiency; the soil is ample, and the growth is satisfactory. External causes are now the reason of failure. Just as in the other cases the explanation of the parable became, as we have sought to show, at once clear to the disciples, so, we venture to think, did they apprehend those types of men of whom our Lord was thinking as soon as He uttered the explanatory words. Though there are slight differences in the threefold synoptic record, there is agreement in the main points, namely, that the "cares" of life and "riches" were the causes of falling away. We have already stressed the fact, obvious as it is, that the disciples were always present with our Lord during His journeyings; they were thus daily witnesses of the multitudes that crowded round Him, and were able to observe the varied types of humanity of which they were composed. When, therefore, Christ spoke of the "cares" of life, and the "deceitfulness of riches," they must have recalled many an episode which made clear to them the types to which our Lord was referring, and the



melancholy truth of what He said. These types were the poor and the rich. Our Lord's solicitude for the poor appears often (*e.g.* Matth. xix. 21; Mk. x. 21; Lk. xiv. 13, xviii. 21), and poverty in those days was more terrible than anything experienced in modern times. The mass of the population in Palestine in the early part of the first century A.D. was still rural; apart from bad harvests there was always the danger of unemployment (*cp.* Matth. xx. 7, "No man hath hired us"). The free labourer often led a precarious existence; the slave had his troubles too. Beggars are not infrequently referred to (*e.g.* Mk. x. 46; Lk. xviii. 35; John ix. 8; and *cp.* also Matth. vi. 1 ff.; Lk. xi. 41, xii. 33; Acts iii. 2 f., x. 2 ff.), and the great importance laid on almsgiving in the Apocrypha (*e.g.* Ecclus. iii. 30, xii. 1-6, xxix. 12; Tob. i. 3, 16, ii. 14, iv. 7-11, xii. 8, 9), and in the early Rabbinical literature, witnesses to the ubiquity of the poor (*cp.* Matth. xxvi. 11, "For ye have the poor always with you").

In going about the country with our Lord, then, the disciples saw among the multitudes many of the poor; and they had heard the words addressed to the poor which, to these, must have sounded like a mockery. "Be not anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than food, and the body than the raiment . . . ?" What meaning could such words have had for those who barely knew from day to day how to keep body and soul together? Overburdened with the cares of life, no wonder the word was choked, and they became unfruitful! The disciples knew well enough, from our Lord's explanatory words, who were meant by the seed which fell among thorns. But they knew something else too. Hard as it was, when the spectre of hunger had reared its head and the tattered rags began to fall from the emaciated body—hard as it was at such a time to believe that any power existed to relieve, to feed, to clothe—yet that power was there, and the disciples had witnessed many concrete instances of its working; a few have been recorded; *e.g.* the blind beggar healed (Mk. x. 46 ff.), the outcast leper cleansed (Matth. viii. 2, 3), the



homeless raving lunatic living among the tombs cured (Mk. v. 2 ff.). These things the disciples had witnessed again and again, and their own experience had been striking, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee" (Matth. xix. 27), but they lacked nothing (Lk. xxii. 35); they knew that the ways and means of God are manifold. Yet they could not fail to see that, in spite of all, the faith of so many of the poor could not withstand the cares and worries which were their constant lot.

The poor, then, constituted the first type of those compared with the seed that fell among thorns. By the second type we must understand the rich. Here again, the disciples must have recalled many a sad scene of blighted hopes; of these, one notable instance has been recorded. They had seen the case of a truly good man of wealth, with a real longing to do what was right, coming to our Lord for guidance; he was told that, in spite of all his goodness, he lacked one thing: "If thou wouldest be perfect, go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me. But when the young man heard the saying, he went away sorrowful; for he was one that had great possessions" (Matth. xix. 16-22; Mk. x. 17-22; Lk. xviii. 18-23). It may well be that in this case there were special reasons, of which we are not told, why wealth was a danger to this man, whom Jesus loved (Mk. x. 21); for it is evident that our Lord did not condemn wealth as such, otherwise He would not have consorted with the rich (see, *e.g.*, Matth. xxvii. 57; Lk. xiv. 1, xix. 2 ff.). Nevertheless, nobody could have known better than He did, for He saw into the hearts of men, the snares of wealth; and He set an ideal of which He Himself was the living embodiment (Matth. viii. 20; Lk. ix. 58).

But it is important to note—if we are right in our interpretation of the verses of the parable under discussion (7 and 22)—that our Lord recognized that poverty had its temptations as well as riches; the daily cares and worries of the poor may be a bar to faith, may tempt to the belief that God is indifferent, and thus engender unbelief; want may tempt to dishonesty; dependence on others may undermine

self-respect. That the temptations of the rich prevented them from bringing forth spiritual fruit would have been clear enough to the disciples, so that this second type of those corresponding to the seed sown among thorns was well understood by them.

"And he that was sown upon the good ground, this is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; who verily beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty" (Matth. xiii. 23; Mk. iv. 20 has: "... such as hear the word, and accept it, and bear fruit, thirtyfold, and sixtyfold, and a hundred-fold"; Lk. viii. 15 is somewhat different: "... such as in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, hold it fast, and bring forth fruit with patience").

It has been interestingly pointed out in reference to this last verse that, in combining the records of the three evangelists, the full outcome of the seed which has been sown in good ground is set forth, thus: the word is *understood* (συνιείς, Matth.), *i.e.*, heart, disposition, mind have been opened out to the truth; they have *accepted* the word (παράδεχονται Mk.), *i.e.*, unlike the superficial hearers, the word has been absorbed; and they have *held fast* (κατέχουσιν, Lk.) the word, so that the seed bears fruit (καρποφοροῦσιν), and in this fruitfulness the hearers show their steadfastness, and are able to continue, ever bringing forth new fruit (ἐν ὑπομονῇ).<sup>1</sup>

If, in all the other cases, certain types of men were in the mind of our Lord when uttering the parable and explaining it to the disciples, who readily grasped the allusions, after the explanation, it would seem that the same must have been the case here. Of whom, then, was our Lord thinking? Primarily, of the disciples themselves; doubtless there were others who were true and steadfast in their allegiance, but the chosen twelve had been, and were, His special followers: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations" (Lk. xxii. 28); and when they heard His words about the seed sown in good ground and bearing fruit, they can hardly have failed to experience a solemn joy in perceiving

<sup>1</sup> Bugge, *Die Haupt-Parabeln Jesu*, p. 119 (1903).

that their Lord had them in mind. Others there must have been too, but they were few.

The applicability of this parable to individuals in all ages is abundantly clear, though our familiarity with it is sometimes apt to obscure its home-truths. With this practical application of the parable we have not been concerned here, since our present purpose has been to consider its primary object and meaning, and to emphasize its significance for the disciples. One point of its present-day practical value may, however, be referred to: the parable has its message to those followers of Christ to-day who are apt to be disheartened in face of the comparatively small response of the multitudes to Christ's call; but, according to His teaching, this is not a reason for discouragement to His followers, since, men and women being what they are, the unresponsiveness of the mass is in the nature of things. That fact is fraught with tremendous consequences to the multitudes; but with this the parable does not deal; other parables do. This parable was spoken to Christ's closest disciples, and explained something to them which at first they found difficult to understand: why do so few respond? It was one of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven. The question was once put to our Lord: "Lord, are they few that be saved?" (Lk. xiii. 23). The answer implies that they are but few; but it goes on to explain why. It comes to this: the abuse of free-will. Our parable teaches a similar truth. The free choice was granted to men either of following our Lord's guidance or of going their own way; and the great majority chose the latter.

\* \* \* \* \*

A matter directly connected with our parable, though not part of it, demands some notice, especially as what is to be said applies to all the parables of the Kingdom.

In each of the Synoptic Gospels a section, of differing length in each, comes between the parable and its explanation to the disciples, the content of which has naturally enough occasioned much perplexity: viz. Matth. xiii. 10-15; Mk. iv. 10-12; Lk. viii. 9. For obvious reasons we will begin by quoting Isa. vi. 9, 10 as this stands in the Hebrew text:



“And he said, Go, and say to this people, ‘Go on hearkening (*Shimē‘u shamo‘a*), but understand not; go on looking (*Rē‘u ra‘o*), but perceive not.’ Make fat the heart of this people, and its ears make heavy, and its eyes besmear; lest it see with its eyes, and with its ears hear, and its heart understand, so that it should be healed again” (*Wēshab wērapha’ lo*).

It is necessary also to give the Septuagint version:

“And he said, Go and say to this people, ‘Ye shall hear indeed, but ye shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive.’ For the heart of this people has become gross, and with their ears they hear heavily, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.”

The point of importance to note here is the toning down of the Septuagint version; instead of, “Make fat the heart of this people . . .,” it has, “For the heart of this people has become gross . . .”; according to the Hebrew, it sounds as though it were the prophet through whom the people are to become renegade; according to the Septuagint, it is the people whose obstinacy is the cause of their falling away. According to the Hebrew, then, it might be urged that the people could not help themselves, since a stronger will was compelling them; but, according to the Greek, it is the people who of their own initiative have gone astray. But let us consider this a little further.

The meaning of the Hebrew text is this: Isaiah is bidden to be instant in causing the people to hear about the purposes of Yahweh and to observe their fulfilment in manifold form, thus imparting to them what constitutes the essence of true religion, *i.e.* the knowledge of God and the recognition of His will. To those who were faithful to God this revelation of Him through His prophet was the sign and earnest of His favour and grace; these were, however, but a remnant. To the great mass who refused allegiance to



Yahweh the prophet's revealing words became a sign of divine wrath, and as a result their religion degenerated into a hopeless sham. To such the prophet's words became inevitably the cause and means of deserved perdition. It is in this sense that we must understand the words, "Make fat the heart of this people, etc."; the prophet does in fact do this, but it is not as though that were the divine wish or the prophet's wish; it is simply what, in the circumstances, is bound to be the fact. To reject God and His word entailed hardness of heart and blindness of perception; ignoring Him and His precepts brought about a condition of inability to understand His words; men invited judgement upon themselves; in that state how could they be healed again?

The toning down in the Septuagint version is thus in words, not in essence, though it appears that the method of Hebrew expression was misunderstood.

Let us now turn to the Gospels. The Isaianic quotation is differently presented in each. Matthew, following the Septuagint, gives the words thus (xiii. 13): "Therefore speak I to them in parables; because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand." The meaning would seem to be that inasmuch as the great mass who came to Christ mainly for what they could get, but without the sincere wish to be guided by Him, were unworthy, unfitted, to be initiated into the mysteries of the Kingdom; it was, therefore, not given to them to know those mysteries (see verse 11), they were outside the Kingdom (cp. Mk. iv. 11). Now after the words just quoted there follows immediately, in verse 14: "And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith," and then the full quotation from Isa. vi. 9, 10 is added. But the quotation, or as much of it as was relevant to the purpose in hand, had already been given; moreover, the latter part of the full quotation is quite out of harmony with our Lord's brief adaptation of it. The evangelist can hardly have meant that our Lord repeated the quotation in full; he gives his own comment on what our Lord has said;<sup>1</sup> the whole

<sup>1</sup> Just as in John xii. 39, 40, where the evangelist is giving his own comment.

passage is more pointed if verse 16 be read immediately after verse 13. In other words, verses 14, 15 were not uttered by our Lord; and this is further borne out by referring to the parallel passages, Mk. iv. 12, Lk. viii. 10, where the full quotation is not given. In Mk. iv. 12, it is true, the further part of the quotation (inaccurately quoted) is added: "Lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them"; but this is so incompatible with the spirit of our Lord that it may safely be put down to the evangelist who held that the blindness and hardness of heart of so many of the Jews towards our Lord's teaching was a "fulfilment" of prophecy. Possibly Lk. viii. 10 comes nearest to what our Lord actually said: ". . . that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand," though here it must be noted that the Greek "in order that" (*iiva*) may quite legitimately be understood as "so that," or "as a result that" (*ὥστε*). The verse may then be thus rendered: "Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God; but to the rest in parables; as a result that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand." Thus, in accordance with what has already been said, it seems to have been our Lord's intention that in uttering parables about the Kingdom of Heaven, their deeper meaning should be reserved for that inner circle of His followers who clung faithfully to Him and to His teaching, although they may not themselves at first have grasped its fuller and deeper meaning.<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, another possibility. Though, in the main, Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from the Septuagint version, one cannot help wondering whether our Lord Himself was not conversant with the Scriptures in their original form, and quoted, whether in Aramaic or Greek, from the Hebrew rather than from the Septuagint form. By the time the Gospels were written there can, of course, be little doubt but that the Septuagint had become the Bible of the Church. On the supposition that though our Lord originally quoted from the Hebrew,

<sup>1</sup> See, further, Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-15, though he would probably not agree with some of the things said above.

we can understand that those who, later, recorded His sayings would have given the Old Testament quotations in the now more familiar Septuagint form. In this case the purpose of the quotation would have been to express the meaning which the words had in their original setting, as indicated above.

This is borne out by the words in Matth. xiii. 12: "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath." In the other two Gospels they occur later (Mk. iv. 25; Lk. viii. 18). McNeile on this verse says: "In Mark both halves of the saying refer to the disciples, who have been privileged to receive instruction; here the two halves refer to disciples and non-disciples respectively. But this cannot be its true context, since parables spoken to those who have *not been given* a knowledge of the mysteries cannot be said to take away that which they have. And its insertion breaks the connexion between verses 11 and 13."<sup>1</sup> This is, no doubt, true; at first sight the second half of the verse does seem to be out of place; the whole verse should come *after* the Isaianic quotation, whatever its form, as in Mark and Luke. But its appropriateness is very pointed if, as surmised above, our Lord intended to express the meaning of Isaiah's words as in their original context.

Here it will not be out of place if we quote some interesting words in reference to Matth. xiii. 12, written by Dr. C. G. Montefiore: "The fundamental idea of this verse is not unfamiliar to the Rabbis, where it is more usually directed to the acquisition of knowledge. Thus Hillel<sup>2</sup> said, 'He who does not increase his knowledge decreases it' (Aboth i. 13). More generally we have: 'If a man hearkens to one commandment, they (= God) cause him to hearken to many commandments; if a man forgets one commandment, they cause him to forget many commandments.' 'If a man desires to hearken at once, they cause him to hearken even subsequently; if a man forgets at once, they cause him to forget subsequently. If a man hearkens with his free will, they cause him to hearken even against, *i.e.* without, his will; if he forgets with his free will, they cause him to forget

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 190 (1915).

<sup>2</sup> End of last century B.C.

even against his will.' . . . 'Not as with men is the method of God. With men a full vessel receives no more: an empty vessel gets filled. With God, the full is filled: the empty is not filled. If you have heard, you will continue to hear; if you have not heard, you will not hear (subsequently). If you have heard the old, you will also hear the new; if you have turned your heart away, you will hear no more' (*Berachoth* 40a)." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, pp. 252 f. (1930); Bacher, *Agada der Tannaiten*, i. 412 (1903).



## LECTURE IV

### THE PARABLE OF THE WHEAT AND THE TARES

[Matth. xiii. 24-30, 36-43]

### AND THE PARABLE OF THE AUTOMATIC ACTION OF THE SOIL

[Mk. iv. 26-29]

WE have seen that the Parable of the Sower had as its object to explain to the disciples the, to them, unaccountable fact that though such multitudes came to our Lord, composed of all classes of the community, to hear His words and to witness His mighty works, yet so few were permanently influenced by what they heard and saw. This was a "mystery" concerning the Kingdom of Heaven which required explaining; to the multitudes the explanation would have been meaningless; to the disciples it was illuminating; they understood now that thoughtlessness, self-righteousness, engrossment in worldly affairs, necessarily entailed indifference to heavenly truths; perhaps they recalled the saying about casting pearls before swine!

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares had, similarly, the object of revealing to the disciples another "mystery" concerning the Kingdom of Heaven.

With all the advantages which the disciples enjoyed through their close companionship with our Lord, they were, nevertheless, in many things greatly lacking in understanding (see, *e.g.*, Matth. xvii. 20; Mk. vii. 18, viii. 17, x. 14; Lk. xxiv. 25). Prominent here was their conception about the Kingdom which Christ came to found (see, *e.g.*, Acts i. 6: "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel?"). As among the people generally, their idea of deliverance centred in the throwing off of the yoke of Roman domination, and they, too, looked forward with ardour to the time when the nation would be freed from all

its ills. Their interest in the Kingdom was thus, in the first instance, political, a fact which largely explains why our Lord during the early period of His ministry was so anxious to conceal His Messiahship; the disciples were not yet prepared to receive the fullness of truth. Nevertheless, their constant presence with Christ had taught them that there were elements of the Kingdom which were of higher importance than the abolition of political evils. It is, moreover, highly probable that some of them, at least, had been followers of the Baptist; and by him they had been taught to look at things chiefly from an ethical standpoint. Though by no means blind to the political ills from which the people were suffering, the moral point of view in regard to the Kingdom was paramount with the Baptist, and therefore with his followers (Mk. i. 4: "John came, who baptized in the wilderness, and preached the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins"). When, therefore, Christ appeared, His nearest disciples would from the outset have expected, first and foremost, a moral cleansing in regard to the Kingdom, the elimination of all unholy elements; and this expectation would obviously have been strengthened by intercourse with our Lord. If the Kingdom of Heaven on earth was to be, in any real sense, ideal, it would, above all things, show forth unequivocal moral purity. Closely connected with this conviction—indeed, following from it—was the further one that the advent of the Kingdom would result in the total annihilation of the powers of evil—a belief frequently expressed in the apocalyptic literature, and one which was, of course, in accordance with the teaching of the Baptist; though he himself was unable to do that which would be accomplished by one greater than he: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire; whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff he will burn up with unquenchable fire" (Matth. iii. 11, 12). Thus had the Baptist, the forerunner, described the purification which would be brought

about in the nation with the advent of the Messiah and his Kingdom.

This was what the disciples looked for. But what were the facts? The disciples could not conceal from themselves that many of those who were ostensibly followers of Christ were morally unfit for the Kingdom; they saw many upon whom the teaching of Christ had no real or lasting effect; they saw many self-righteous scribes, many hypocritical Pharisees; they saw many whose hearts were not truly with Christ, and whose belief in Him as the Messiah had grown weak. And yet they saw that our Lord willingly received all such daily! Was He prepared to receive men of these types? What, under such circumstances, became of their idea of the Kingdom as containing that only which was pure, and moral, and true? Why did Christ not fulfil the words of His forerunner, and "thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor," and gather in the wheat, and X discard the chaff? A certain exclusiveness, sometimes in evidence among them, was doubtless prompted by the desire that none but genuine and whole-hearted adherents of our Lord should be recognized by Him as worthy of belonging to the Kingdom; thus, on one occasion they said to Him: "Master, we saw one casting out demons in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us." The unexpected reply must have come as a shock to them: "Forbid him not; for he that is not against you is for you" (Lk. ix. 49, 50). A Gentile woman, seeking help from our Lord, was an offence to them; "Send her away," they say, "for she crieth after us" (Matth. xv. 23). Or again, when our Lord expressed the intention of abiding at the house of Zacchæus, they all (that the disciples were included is clear from xviii. 31) murmured, saying, "He is gone in to lodge with a man that is a sinner" (Lk. xix. 7). These things point to an attitude of mind among Christ's closest disciples which was prompted by the best of motives; for, although they looked for an earthly kingdom which Christ would set up, they were primarily concerned, with regard to it, that it should exclude everything that was in any sense unfitting; and our Lord's frequent attitude of toleration and kindness



to all and sundry did not seem to them compatible with the high ideals He taught. There were more ways than one whereby our Lord dealt with this mistaken though well-intentioned zeal. The first, in the order given in Matthew, was by the parable of the Wheat and the Tares.

"The Kingdom of Heaven is likened unto a man that sowed good seed in his field"; more accurately, perhaps, "hath become like. . . ." The comparison of the Kingdom of Heaven with a man sounds strange in our ears (cp. xviii. 23, xx. i, xxii. 2, xxv. 1); but it is a common, pregnant mode of expression often occurring in Rabbinical parables. We should express it somewhat in this way: the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared with the conditions obtaining when a man sows good seed in his field, and an enemy comes by night and sows tares. . . . The parable sets forth conditions already existent in the Kingdom. One or two other points in the parable may be thought inconsistent or unlikely; e.g. the man in question is represented as wealthy, since he has servants; and yet he sows the seed himself! Again, since tares grow of their own accord among wheat, there is no need for anyone to come and sow them! Such and similar objections to the genuineness of this and other parables have been made; but a little knowledge of our Lord's Jewish mental environment, and of the Jewish ways of expressing things, would show the absurdity of such trivial and hair-splitting criticisms.

The parable continues: "But while men slept his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away." Extraordinary as this proceeding may appear, such action was far from being unknown in ancient times. Our Lord was not conjuring up some imaginary proceeding in order to heighten the effect of His words; He was referring to a nefarious act which many of His hearers must have known to have been perpetrated from time to time. It is referred to by Roberts,<sup>1</sup> and it is dealt with in Roman law, in the Digests of the *Corpus juris civilis*.<sup>2</sup> Even at the present day in

<sup>1</sup> *Oriental Illustrations*, p. 541 (referred to by Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 130).

<sup>2</sup> Lib. ix. tit. 2, lege 27, § 14 [ad legem Aquiliam], referred to by Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 130.



India one of the most terrible threats that a man can make is: "I will sow bad seed in your field," mentioning an evil-smelling seed which has the effect of greatly damaging good seed.

The tares spoken of in the parable (*lolium temulentum*) are a kind of pseudo-wheat. In its early stage of development this plant is indistinguishable from genuine wheat; the seed, if eaten, has a strongly narcotic effect. From statements in early Rabbinical writings it appears that this plant so closely resembled wheat that it was regarded as a degenerate form of it, having sprung from seed in uncongenial soil. This is incorrect, but the statement illustrates the great similarity which exists between the two in their undeveloped form. According to an ancient Jewish tradition (*Bereshith Rabba* to Gen. vi. 7), the tares originated from the time of the Flood; for men, animals, and plants all went astray and brought forth contrary to nature; thus, when wheat was sowed it brought forth tares. The Hebrew words for tares is *zunin*, which, according to haggadic etymology, was said to be derived from the root *zanah*, "to commit fornication."<sup>1</sup>

The similarity between the tares and the wheat has an important bearing on the purpose of the parable, since it is implied that in the early stages of spiritual growth the members of the Kingdom differ so little from one another that their respective tendencies cannot yet be discerned.

The parable then continues: "But when the blade sprang up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also." Thomson, in his well-known work, writes: "Let me call your attention to the 'tares' growing amongst the barley. Both are in just the proper stage of development to illustrate the parable of Christ. In those parts where the grain has headed out, the tares have done the same, and there a child could not mistake them for wheat or barley; but where both are less developed, the closest scrutiny will often fail to detect them. Even the farmers, who in this country generally weed their fields, do not pretend to distinguish the one from the other until both are well grown. They would not only mistake good grain for tares, but very commonly

<sup>1</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* . . . , p. 667 (1922).

the roots of the two are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate them without plucking up both.”<sup>1</sup> The verse before us describes the period of development at which, as Thomson says, a child could distinguish between the two, because the wheat had then grown higher than the tares on account of the seed being larger.

“And the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? Whence then hath it tares? And he said unto them, An enemy hath done this.”

To object that the surprise of the servants is uncalled-for, because tares often grow up among wheat, is quite unnecessary; one must have regard to the purpose for which a parable is told; for a parable is constructed in accordance with that purpose. What is required for the teaching of this parable is that the field in this case should be free from tares, as happened often enough; the servants were, therefore, naturally surprised when they saw the tares. The householder, again for the purpose of the parable, is represented as discerning the act of an enemy; and since there is an enemy about, there is really no cause for him to be surprised. The servants then put the further question: “Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up?” Here again another superficial objection could be raised: the question is absurd because the servants must have known the impossibility of pulling up the tares without the wheat. The objection is invalid because, as we shall see, one of the purposes of the parable was to show that in another sphere this was just the kind of thing that was contemplated by those who ought to have known better.

So the householder replies: “Nay; lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather up first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”

Now, this parable was spoken with the object of placing before the disciples what was one of the mysteries of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Land and the Book*: Central Palestine and Phœnicia, p. 395 (1883).

Kingdom of Heaven; but they did not understand it. So when they were alone with Christ in the house, they asked Him to explain it to them. And, in truth, it required explanation; for it is not a parable in the ordinary sense of the word; it is, strictly speaking, an allegory. It has been pointed out above (p. 14) that there is a marked difference between a parable and an allegory, the difference being the same as that between "to be like," and "to mean"; between, "to place side by side," and "to identify"; between "to compare" and "to indicate." A parable is explained, an allegory is interpreted. In whatever way one may define an allegory, it is, like a metaphor, something that requires thinking out in a way different from that required for the understanding of a parable; and even then, the meaning which the *speaker* has in mind may not be that assumed by the listener. In the case of the allegory of the Wheat and the Tares it is quite obvious that the meaning which our Lord had in mind was not that which an ordinary hearer or reader would put upon it if it stood alone, without His interpretation.

Christ begins His interpretation by saying: "He that soweth the good seed is the Son of Man." It is held by many scholars, and with much reason, that the use of the term "Son of Man" here, as elsewhere, is expressive of Christ's Messianic consciousness<sup>1</sup>; if then, as we are justified in assuming, the nearest disciples associated this title with Christ's Messiahship and all that this implied, their perplexity must have been great when Christ went on to say: "And the field is the world." For, as pointed out above, in the mind of the great mass of Jews at this time, including the disciples, the domain over which the Messianic Son of Man was going to rule was Palestine. In spite of the teaching of the prophets, and owing to the narrow nationalistic expectations widely held and taught, and in spite of the teaching of the Baptist, who, in addressing the Pharisees and Sadducees, had said: "Think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father; for I say unto you

<sup>1</sup> In verse 41 this is clearly the case; the term is not likely to have been used in two different senses in the same parable.



that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matth. iii. 9)—in spite of this, the disciples regarded the world in general as being outside the sphere of divine solicitude, and therefore excluded from the Messiah's consideration. They were, of course, fully alive to the fact that within the Jewish Church there were elements corresponding to the tares; but that the seed in which the good seed was sowed should be, not the restricted domain of their thoughts, but the world—this was not in accordance with their ideas.

The universalistic note, which our Lord thus strikes in this allegory, calls for a little further consideration. The teaching of the prophets had found expression again and again in later days in the writings of the apocalyptists. The apocalyptic literature contains numerous passages in which ultimate salvation is not restricted to Israel, but is extended to all that is good in the Gentile world. This literature bears witness to the fact that the dominant religious leaders of our Lord's time, *i.e.* the Pharisaic teachers, were by no means the sole representatives of Jewish thought, though their influence was undoubtedly dominant. Quite apart from the Jews of the Dispersion, whose religious views were naturally of a more liberal caste owing to their being brought into more direct contact with the outside world, than was the case with their brethren in Palestine—quite apart from the Jews of the Dispersion, there were in Palestine itself, and especially in the northern parts, many, though certainly in a large minority, who had no sympathy with the narrow exclusiveness of the official religious leaders. We have mention, in Lk. ii. 25 ff., of an adherent of the more liberal-minded among the Jews, in the person of the aged Simeon; though looking for the "Consolation of Israel," he says, on beholding the infant Jesus: "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples; a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel."

It must be remembered, then, that when our Lord came on earth He found in Palestine among His people those who were in direct opposition on this question of the salvation



of the Gentiles. He Himself, although restricting His activity almost entirely to His own people, not infrequently gave clear indications that His mission was to be worldwide. His purpose was to make His people the medium for this ("Salvation is from the Jews," John iv. 22; cp. Rom. ix. 4, 5). In this connexion we recall our Lord's reference to Jonah as a sign of redemption to the Ninevites, the type *par excellence* of the nations of the world (Lk. xi. 30); His reference to the queen of Sheba (Matth. xii. 39-42); His word and act to the Syro-Phœnician woman (Mk. vii. 26 ff.); His reference to the Phœnician cities of Tyre and Sidon (Matth. xi. 20-24); and the words: "I say unto you that many shall come from the east and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven, but the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness . . ." (Matth. viii. 11, 12). Passages like these, and other similar ones, point clearly to the fact that our Lord's conception of the Kingdom differed fundamentally from that of the bulk of the people.

In this parable, then, which deals with the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven, this note of universalism is sounded at the outset of its interpretation. The field in which the good seed is sowed is not the Jewish Church, but the world.

The interpretation then continues: "The good seed, these are the sons of the Kingdom." The phrase "sons of the Kingdom" occurs elsewhere only in Matth. viii. 12; in Jewish thought "son" = "heir" (cp. Matth. xxi. 38; Mk. xii. 7; Lk. xx. 14; Rom. viii. 17; Gal. iv. 7), so that, generally speaking, the "sons of the Kingdom" would be thought of as those who had a right to inherit the Kingdom; so in Matth. viii. 12, though there the "sons of the Kingdom" are cast out. In the verse before us, however, where the "sons of the Kingdom" stand in contrast to the "sons of the evil (one)," the former are those who are received into the Kingdom not by right of inheritance, but because they partake of the spirit of their "Father" (see verse 43), in contrast to those who partake of the spirit of the evil one (cp. John viii. 44, "Ye are of your father the devil").

“The tares are the sons of the evil (one), and the enemy that sowed them is the devil.” It is here taught that the devil introduces his followers into the midst of those who are of upright heart; the purpose being to damage them and thus hinder them from further development. Here we have an instructive illustration of the fact that in a parable it is not to be expected that all sides of a truth can be dealt with. The question of how evil originates in man was, naturally, one which greatly occupied the minds of Jewish thinkers both before and after the time of our Lord. To enter into the subject of the Jewish doctrine of sin would be out of place here; it must suffice to say that sin in man was held to be due to an external and an internal cause: Satan from without, the “evil tendency” (*yetzer ha-ra*) from within. These beliefs run parallel, and no attempt is made to solve the problem of the relation between the two. Similarly in the New Testament: on the one hand, *e.g.*, “. . . that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. vi. 11); on the other: “But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me” (Rom. vii. 16, 17). So, too, in the Gospels; on the one hand, *e.g.*, the passage before us; on the other, *e.g.*: “For out of the heart come forth evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, theft . . . ; these are the things which defile a man” (Matth. xv. 19, 20).

In this parable, then, only one side of the question of evil in man is touched upon, and necessarily so.

“And the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels.”

The phrase “the end of the world” (*ἡ συντέλεια τοῦ αἰῶνος*) is an apocalyptic one; “world” here means “age”; in verse 39 it means what we ordinarily understand by the world. The phrase occurs again in verses 40, 49, also in xxiv. 3 and xxviii. 20, but not in the other Gospels. In the Apoc. of Bar. lxxxiii. 7 it is said: “The consummation of the age, moreover, will then show the great might of its ruler, when all things come to judgement,” similarly in the Ezra Apoc. (2 [4] Esdras) vii. 113, and elsewhere in this litera-

ture.<sup>1</sup> The mention of the angels is an apocalyptic element, thus, in Enoch c. 4 we read: "In those days the angels shall descend into the secret places, and gather together into one place all those who brought down sin; and the Most High will arise on that day of judgement to execute great judgement amongst sinners."<sup>2</sup>

"As, therefore, the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be in the end of the world . . ." (40-42). In these verses also there are various apocalyptic thoughts and phrases; "burned with fire," and "furnace of fire" recall Enoch ciii. 8: "And into darkness and chains and a burning flame where there is grievous judgement shall your spirits enter; and the great judgement shall be for all the generations of the world"; and in the Ezra Apoc. (2 [4] Esdras) vii. 36, 38 mention is made of the "furnace of Gehenna," and "fire and torments." In the Book of Jubilees ix. 15, there is mention of the day of judgement, "on which the Lord God shall judge them with a sword and with fire, for all the unclean wickedness of their errors, wherewith they have filled the earth with transgression . . ." (cp. in the parable the words: "and they shall gather out of his Kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity"). With the phrase "weeping and gnashing of teeth" cp. Enoch cviii. 5, 6: "And I asked . . . 'What is this shining thing? for it is not a heaven, but only the flame of a blazing fire, and the voice of weeping and lamentation and strong pain.' And he said unto me: 'This place which thou seest, here are cast the spirits of sinners and blasphemers, and of those who work wickedness, and of those who pervert everything that the Lord hath spoken through the mouth of the prophets. . . .'" The phrase is also used in Rabbinical literature in reference to the rage and despair of the damned (Midrash, *Kohemoth* to i. 15).<sup>3</sup> The words: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father," contain a thought which occurs in the *Book of Enoch* a number of times, e.g. in lviii. 3: "And the

<sup>1</sup> See further, Dalman, *Die Worte Jesu*, pp. 126 f. (1898).

<sup>2</sup> "All those who brought down sin" refers to the fallen angels (see Gen. vi. 1, 2); the "sinners" refer to men.

<sup>3</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, i. 673.



righteous shall be in the light of the sun, and the elect in the light of eternal life"; xxxviii. 4: "For the Lord of Spirits hath caused his light to appear on the face of the holy, righteous and elect"; and cviii. 12, 13: "And I will bring forth in shining light those that have loved my holy name, and I will seat each on the throne of his honour. And they shall be resplendent for times without number; for righteousness is the judgement of God. . . ."

It has been necessary to give illustrations from the apocalyptic literature—they could be greatly multiplied—in order to show how full verses 39–42 are of apocalyptic elements, because this is the main reason why many scholars question the genuineness of this explanatory section; McNeile, for example, says that "the style of verses 37–43 is certainly stilted compared with that of the explanation of the 'Sower' (verses 18–23); the interpretation of the successive details is mechanical; the apocalyptic expectations are of a popular and conventional character, and are expressed, to a large extent, in stereotyped formulas; and the use of the title 'Son of Man' for Jesus, first in His human life (verse 37), and then in His Messianic glory (verse 41), must be due to Christian tradition. If Jesus Himself gave an explanation of the parable, it is probable that very little of it has been preserved."<sup>1</sup>

There is justice in this; but it does not affect the parable itself. The "mystery" which the parable reveals to the disciples is that the separation of the good and the bad is not only not necessary, but positively harmful to the children of the Kingdom ("lest haply while ye gather up the tares, ye root up the wheat with them"). The separation is to be delayed until the time when it will not harm them. That time must be preceded by a period of growth and development: opportunity must be given to the children of the Kingdom to take root firmly. It is easy enough to point to incongruities in the construction of the parable by saying that it does not correspond with the actual facts of life, where the good are often separated from the bad, by inclination, or

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 202 f.; see also Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 183 ff.



death, or other cause; that in life contact with the wicked often does lead the innocent astray, so that the sooner they are separated the better; and so on. But it must be realized that what to the logical Western mind are incongruities do not strike the Oriental mind as such; ideas, not verbal accuracy, are the main thing; the Oriental mind is far too pliable to be troubled about logic. This parable had a specific object in view; the subsidiary details did not matter.

From their point of view, the disciples, with their burning zeal, might well expect the elimination from Christ's *entourage* of everything that seemed to them unfitting; but circumscribed and short-sighted views are not infrequently accompanied by blind zeal. They were in a hurry; and it was natural; high aims and purity of motive are impatient of all that seems to impede the march to the glorious goal.

But they understood only in part; and our Lord, by the repeated metaphor of the seed and its gradual development, evidently intended them to learn that the Kingdom is of slow expansion—according to man's reckoning. And the same is true also of what seemed to the disciples—and not to them only—the lack of ideal purity among those with whom our Lord was content to associate. The disciples would have wished our Lord to make a clean sweep of all the undesirable elements that crowded around Him. But it is made clear to them that this is not Christ's way; the sphere of His activity is the world, and the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, being in the world, takes account of the conditions *in* the world, though itself not *of* the world.

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares presents a world-fact which to many may appear as great a mystery to-day as it did in the time of the first disciples. Why does God permit the existence of so much evil in the world when its elimination on the part of Him who is all-powerful would put all things right? Why is not the prayer "Thy Kingdom come," poured forth from the lips of millions, answered? Why not let the separation of the wheat and tares take place at

once so that the sons of the Kingdom may enter without delay into their inheritance? One part of the answer, at any rate, is suggested by this parable, and is as pointed to-day as in the days of its first utterance: the growth is still in that undeveloped stage in which the wheat and the tares cannot be distinguished; how many would dare to say without misgiving, "I am of the wheat"? how many would care to say: "I am of the tares"?

#### THE PARABLE OF THE AUTOMATIC ACTION OF THE SOIL

[Mk. iv. 26-29]

So Swete aptly entitles this parable.<sup>1</sup> According to Mk. iv. 33, 34, it was spoken, like the parable just dealt with, to the whole multitude, but privately expounded to the disciples, though of this latter we have no record. There are parallel elements between these two parables, but the central theme of each is different; in the former the main point is that there are both good and bad elements in the Kingdom during its existence on this earth; in this parable the leading thought is that the growth and development of the Kingdom take time; it reads like a comment of what is said in Matth. xi. 12: "And from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force," meaning that from the first preaching of the Kingdom many ardent adherents, believing in the near approach of Messianic rule according to the traditional conception, sought to force its realization by violent methods;<sup>2</sup> an echo of this occurs in John vi. 14, 15: "When, therefore, the people saw the sign which he did, they said, this is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world. Jesus, therefore, perceiving that they were about

<sup>1</sup> *The Gospel according to St. Mark*, p. 80 (1898).

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Dodd (*op. cit.*, p. 183): "The parable of the Tares . . . is often supposed to be that evangelist's (*i.e.* Matthew) elaboration of the Marcan parable of the Seed growing secretly. This does not seem to me in the least probable."

to come and take him by force, to make him King, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone." It is against the twofold error of the speedy advent of the Kingdom, with which the idea of its temporal character was so intimately connected, that this parable is directed. But here we are confronted by a perplexing problem. This parable clearly teaches that the growth and development of the Kingdom is a long process; it increases but slowly, step by step; the spreading of it is gradual; only by degrees can it reach perfection. But elsewhere we find that the advent of the Kingdom is looked for in the near future; for example: "Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matth. xvi. 28); "Verily, I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of man be come" (Matth. x. 23, cp. verse 7); "Again the high priest asked him, and saith unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am; and ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mk. xiv. 61, 62; cp. also x. 35 ff.). How are these two views concerning the Kingdom, its near advent and its gradual development, to be reconciled? It can be replied that our Lord held the twofold conception of the Kingdom: present now on earth ("the Kingdom of Heaven is within you," Lk. xvii. 21), and imperfect; and future, whether on earth or in Heaven, and perfect.<sup>1</sup> That is doubtless true; but it does not explain how we are to reconcile the teaching of the gradual development of the Kingdom with the assertion of its full completion in the near future. The former is in accordance with what we know to be actual fact; the latter belongs to the domain of apocalyptic thought, and has not even yet come to pass! There are, as it seems to us, two alternatives in explanation: either our Lord accepted, in the later days of His ministry, the apocalyptic conception of the Kingdom; or else these apocalyptic elements in the Gospels regarding the Kingdom

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, ii. 546 (1910).

are due to the early Church, which looked for the speedy advent of Christ. The difficulties attaching to each of these alternatives are undeniable; but perhaps not insuperable.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The whole of this difficult and controversial subject is brilliantly dealt with by Dodd, *op. cit.*, *passim*.



## LECTURE V

### THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED

[Matth. xiii. 31, 32; Mk. iv. 30-32; Lk. xiii. 18, 19]

### THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN

[Matth. xiii. 33; Lk. xiii. 20, 21]

### THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE

[Matth. xiii. 44]

### THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

[Matth. xiii. 45]

### AND THE PARABLE OF THE DRAW-NET

[Matth. xiii. 47-50]

THE numerous verbal differences occurring in the three forms of the parable of the Mustard Seed illustrate the obvious truth that our Lord's sayings circulated in oral form before the Gospels were written; that, however, does not mean to say that the writers of the Gospels as we now have them did not utilize written sources. "A critical reading of the Gospels shows that the evangelists took over material which already possessed a form of its own. They joined some paragraphs together which before had possessed a certain independent completeness."<sup>1</sup> At the same time, such independent completeness is not incompatible with an oral form behind whatever documents the Synoptists made use of. The verbal differences, therefore, are inevitable and natural, and need not be accounted for on any other grounds.<sup>2</sup>

The parables of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven belong to those which deal with the "mysteries" of the Kingdom of Heaven. They form a pair, and are complementary, X and, coming together, they have the object of throwing

<sup>1</sup> Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel*, Engl. transl., p. 4 (1934).

<sup>2</sup> For reasons intended to account for slight textual variations in the parable of the Mustard Seed, see Jülicher, *op. cit.*, pp. 571 f.

light from two different angles upon the subject with which they deal. Each is, on the face of it, of the greatest simplicity, but each teaches something about the Kingdom of Heaven which must have been difficult for our Lord's first hearers to understand.

Turning first to the parable of the Mustard Seed, we ask ourselves what was the "mystery" of the Kingdom of Heaven which it was intended to reveal to the disciples? We must to some extent be guided by the probabilities of the case, as suggested by the parable; and the Gospel narratives, as we shall see, throw a good deal of light, incidentally, on the subject. The parable suggests that the gathering of the multitudes who had at first been drawn to Christ had shrunk (verse 32). It is a not improbable surmise that this was due to the Pharisees; their growing opposition to our Lord is abundantly testified by the Gospels, and, as Josephus tells us, they had "great power over the multitude."<sup>1</sup> The near disciples of our Lord may well have contrasted the coming of "many Pharisees and Sadducees" to the baptism of John the Baptist (Matth. iii. 7) with the enmity shown by them to Christ. The Baptist's work had been brilliantly successful, so far as it went; but it was confessedly only the beginning; vastly greater things were expected when he was heard to say: "In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not, even he that cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose" (John i. 26, 27; Matth. iii. 11; Mk. i. 7; Lk. iii. 16); "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John iii. 30). And when Christ did first appear, the expectations of His followers began to be fulfilled: "And there followed him great multitudes from Galilee, and Decapolis, and Jerusalem, and Judæa, and from beyond Jordan." But after not many months there were signs of a reaction;<sup>2</sup> the Baptist's disciples found fault because Christ's disciples did not fast (Matth. ix. 14); the Baptist himself began to doubt, "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" (Matth. xi. 3; Lk. vii. 20); others said: "Is not this the carpenter's son?"

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq.*, xiii. 288.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. what is said above on the parable of the Sower, pp. 46 ff.

is not his mother called Mary? . . . And they were offended in him " (Matth. xiii. 55, 56; Mk. vi. 3). On one occasion the people became so embittered at His teaching that " they rose up, and cast him forth out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But he, passing through the midst of them, went his way " (Lk. iv. 29). Our Lord's own words show clearly enough the trend of things; the lack of response is ominously brought out by His words to those in the cities " wherein most of his mighty works were done, because they repented not " (Matth. xi. 20-24; Lk. x. 12-16); and, again, in Matth. xi. 16-19, where He likens the people to children sitting in the market-places: " . . . the Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners! " No wonder He said to His disciples: " The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few. Pray ye, therefore, the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest " (Matth. ix. 37, 38; Lk. x. 2).

It was necessary to draw attention to such passages in order to realize what must have been the feelings of the near disciples of our Lord; they could not fail to perceive that things were not progressing as they had hoped. There resulted, we may surmise, disappointment and discouragement. The prospects of the spread of the Kingdom seemed dark.

This, then, forms the background of the two parables under consideration.

" The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which, indeed, is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the heaven come and lodge in the branches thereof " (cf. Ezek. xvii. 22, 23; xxxi. 6; Dan. iv. 12). According to the more exact Western mode of expression, we should say: the development of the Kingdom of Heaven proceeds in the same way as that of the mustard seed, etc.; but to Orientals the outward form of expression is of minor importance so long as the substance is made clear. Objection has

been taken to the statement that the mustard seed is less than all seeds; it is true, from the strictly scientific botanical standpoint it must be allowed that the statement is inexact; for, to take but one example, the seed of the cypress tree is smaller. But the detail is unimportant; besides, in the East the mustard seed was, and is, proverbially used as the ordinary designation for anything very small and insignificant; moreover, according to the popular Jewish conception, it *was* regarded as the smallest of all seeds. In the Talmud (*Berakoth* 31a) a microscopic drop of blood is said to have been no bigger than a mustard seed. In *Leviticus Rabba* on xxiv. 2 a saying of Isaac b. Zera is quoted in which the sinking sun is said to disappear as "a spot of blood as small as a mustard seed." Interesting is the parable in *Canticles Rabba* on vi. 11. . . . It is ascribed to R. Levi (third century?). He says: "In a sack full of nuts you can put ever so many sesame (or poppy ?) seeds, and ever so many mustard seeds, and the nuts will hold them all. Thus, ever so many proselytes may come unto Israel and lie incorporated, as it is said, Who can count the dust of Jacob?"<sup>1</sup> In reference to what is clean and unclean the Rabbis used the simile of a mustard seed: "Spots as small as a mustard seed"; "eating an unclean animal as small as a mustard seed."<sup>2</sup>

Illustrations of this kind show that our Lord was using a comparison which was familiar; we recall also His words: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (*Matth.* xvii. 20). There is a saying among the Arabs at the present day, based probably on these words, about "faith which does not weigh more than a grain of mustard seed."

The main point about this tiny seed is that it develops to such an extent that it exceeds in growth all other plants of its kind; indeed, more than that; for the class to which it

<sup>1</sup> Loewe, quoted by Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 253 (1930).

<sup>2</sup> Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 174, but unfortunately he does not give the references.



belongs is that of *plants*, while the mustard seed grows into a *tree*, reaching up to seven or eight feet in height, and sometimes more; and its branches reach almost the consistency of wood, and spread out like those of a tree in the more literal sense, so that it is different from a plant or shrub. Thomson says: "With the help of my guide, I uprooted a veritable mustard-tree which was more than twelve feet high. In the presence of such stout bushes, which overtop all surrounding 'herbs,' one feels that there is no exaggeration in the parable about the mustard seed."<sup>1</sup> On account of its size it differs from all the other members of its class in that "the birds of heaven come and lodge in its branches," a familiar sight to the people of Palestine; it is especially, we are told, goldfinches and thistle-finches which seek shelter from rain and from the sun's rays in its branches; it has also a special attraction for birds on account of the little black grains of seed which they pick out of the pods growing on the branches.<sup>2</sup>

To those who were listening to this parable, apart from the near disciples, it must have appeared pointless because to them the Messianic Kingdom meant freedom from foreign tyranny and the ushering-in of a time of material prosperity and wellbeing; therefore to them how could there be any correspondence between such expectations and a mustard seed! But to the disciples it was different; doubtless they, too, shared the popular expectations; but their close touch with our Lord had at least taught them that something more than mere material prosperity was in question in the Kingdom over which He would rule. His teaching had revealed to them ideals which were of greater count than worldly benefits; and, therefore, just as their expectations were of a more exalted cast, so was their disappointment proportionately greater when they observed increasing opposition, and decreasing success. They, therefore, understood the parable; no explanation was needed; but it told of one of the hidden things of the Kingdom of Heaven which it was necessary for them to know. Like the insignificant smallness

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.* : Central Palestine and Phœnicia, p. 163 (1883).

<sup>2</sup> Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

of the mustard seed, so is the Kingdom of Heaven in its beginnings. It is planted by the Lord himself in His "field," in a modest plot which He had chosen and prepared. And this plot is not the nation of the Jews, nor is it the world, as in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares; it is the small garden-plot, the little spiritual seed-field, of the closer circle of the disciples. That was one thing which the parable taught the disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven. But there was something else. Just as the grain of mustard seed, so small as it is, develops and reaches a grandeur surpassing all plants of its kind, so will it be with the Kingdom; in spite of its smallness and humble beginnings, in spite of its present restricted area, it will reach a greatness surpassing all other kingdoms, and, unlike them, will acknowledge neither boundary nor limit.<sup>1</sup>

If the first note of the parable meant disillusionment to the disciples, the second caused their heart to vibrate with joy. We come next to the *Parable of the Leaven*:

"The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till it was all leavened."

The comparison of the Kingdom of Heaven with leaven must have come as a shock to many of our Lord's hearers; the fermentation caused by leaven was believed in ancient times to cause putrefaction in the dough, so that leaven represented a process of corruption; hence its ritual prohibitions in the Old Testament, and its evil connotation in the New Testament, apart from this parable (Matth. xvi. 6; 1 Cor. v. 6-8; Gal. v. 9); in Rabbinical literature, too, it is used of degeneracy and mixing of descent.<sup>2</sup> But this initial surprise would at once have been dissipated by the presentation of the homely picture which followed, so familiar to all. This presentation of things of daily experience as a means of teaching is a striking characteristic of our Lord's practice.

We realize the danger, with our modern methods of thought, of reading-in into the parables things which our Lord did not intend; nevertheless, here is something

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Dodd, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> Montefiore, *op. cit.*, p. 253.

in connexion with this parable which can hardly have been foreign to His thought, though it may have escaped the minds of the disciples. The leaven is hid in the three measures of meal so that in due time it is all leavened; that is to say, the leavening which takes place does not result alone in the dough being leavened; more significant is the fact that its nature is entirely changed. It is important to recognize that these two parables present us with two parallel truths concerning the Kingdom of Heaven: in the former, the seed, in spite of its apparent utter insignificance, grows into a tree, visible to all; in this parable the leaven, again an apparently insignificant thing, occasions an inner metamorphosis. The former points to the extensive, this to the intensive character of the Kingdom of Heaven. While dealing, on the one hand, with present conditions, our Lord intended, on the other, to give some insight into His world-kingdom of the future. The Kingdom will ultimately penetrate everywhere throughout the world, and will cover the earth, in the words of the prophet, "as the waters cover the sea"; it will, moreover, altogether transform the world, permeating it so that its nature is changed, imparting to it a new, spiritual dynamic.

These two parables, then, set forth two aspects of the Kingdom; we may illustrate the first by our Lord's words: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matth. viii. 11); the second by His saying: "The Kingdom of God is within you" (Lk. xvii. 21). Two "mysteries," or secrets, of the Kingdom were thus revealed to the inner circle of disciples.

It has been well pointed out that the essence of these two parables, respectively, is shown forth by the sayings: "Ye are the light of the world"; "Ye are the salt of the earth" (Matth. v. 14, 13).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Fiebig, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, p. 217 (1912). We feel impelled to quote here some suggestive words of Dodd: "The parables of growth, then, are susceptible of a natural interpretation which makes them into a commentary on the actual situation during the ministry of Jesus, in its character as the coming of the Kingdom of God in history. They are not to be taken as implying a long process of development introduced by the ministry of Jesus, and to be consummated by His second advent, though the Church later



THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE, AND  
THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT PRICE

[Matth. xiii. 44, 45]

“The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a treasure hidden in a field; which a man found and hid; and in his joy he goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

This hiding of treasure in the ground was a well-known and frequent expedient in those days. It was done on account of the general unsettlement of the times through wars. Josephus makes mention of “the gold and silver, and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had, and which the owners treasured up underground against the uncertain fortunes of war.”<sup>1</sup> But quite apart from that, the treasuring-up of money in the earth was often resorted to; a Rabbinical saying was that there was only one safe repository for money,—the earth.<sup>2</sup> A reference to the custom occurs also in Matth. xxv. 25: “. . . I was afraid, and went away, and hid thy talent in the earth.”

A preliminary moral question in connexion with this parable demands some notice. The man is represented as finding the treasure on land which belonged to someone else; he does not inform the owner of his “find,” but goes and hides it again, and buys the land.

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understood them in that sense. As in the teaching of Jesus as a whole, so here, there is no long historical perspective; the *eschaton*, the divinely ordained climax of history, is here. It has come by no human effort, but by act of God; and yet not by an arbitrary, catastrophic intervention, for it is the harvest following upon a long process of growth. This is the new element which these parables introduce [the reference is to the ‘Parables of Growth,’ viz., the Sower, Tares, Seed growing secretly, Mustard Seed, Leaven, Draw-net]. The coming of the Kingdom is indeed a crisis brought about by divine intervention; but it is not an unprepared crisis, unrelated to the previous course of history. An obscure process of growth has gone before it, and the fresh act of God which calls the crisis into being is an answer to the work of God in history which has gone before. In Jewish apocalypse, although the metaphor of the harvest is used, there is little or no sense of any organic relation between the processes of history and its culmination. The divine event is an unrelated and unconditional intervention. It is not so in the teaching of Jesus. Having come, however, the Kingdom does call for human effort. The harvest waits for reapers, and it is in this light that Jesus sets His own work and that to which He calls His disciples” (*op. cit.*, pp. 193 f.).

<sup>1</sup> Bell. Jud. vii. 115.

<sup>2</sup> For references see Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, ii. 415, 719 (1911).



Our obvious comment on this is to say that the man committed a fraud since the value of the land was enhanced by having this treasure hidden within it, and he kept this fact secret; in any case, it would be thought, the treasure was the property of the original owner of the land. We are faced with the difficulty that our Lord, by telling this parable without comment, seems to acquiesce in the dishonest act. Two things must be said in reply to this. In the first place, Jewish law on the subject was quite different from that of modern times in Western countries,<sup>1</sup> and Jewish law was based upon custom which was largely due to maxims and directions uttered by individual authorities; very significant in this connexion is the information given us in Exod. xviii. 13-26; it is too long to quote in full, but the essence of it is contained in verses 25, 26: "And Moses chose able men out of all Israel, and made them heads over the people . . . and they judged the people at all seasons; the hard cases they brought unto Moses, but every small matter they judged themselves." Here we have, in effect, the beginnings of a judicial system which continued among the Jews far into the Christian era; custom, which had the effect of law, was based upon the utterances and directions of prominent teachers of recognized authority; masses of such sayings are contained in the Talmud, and they belong to periods long before the Talmud received its final form (*circa* A.D. 500), for the sayings of the Rabbis were handed down from teacher to pupil for centuries. With regard to hidden treasure we have, *e.g.*, the following: "What finds belong to the finder, and what [finds] must one cause to be proclaimed? These finds belong to the finder,—if a man finds scattered fruit, scattered money . . . these belong to the finder."<sup>2</sup>

But secondly, there is this further consideration: in all His parabolic teaching our Lord, naturally enough, adopted the method and style of other Jewish teachers; as we know, there is ample material in extant ancient Jewish literature

<sup>1</sup> Although Syria as a whole was under Roman suzerainty, Roman law, whatever it may have been in regard to this matter, did not interfere with Jewish law until quite a century later than the time with which we are dealing.

<sup>2</sup> *Baba mezia* (Mishna) ii. 1.

to prove that this is the fact. Now, it was a fundamental principle of Jewish parabolic teaching that the external form of a parable was of relatively secondary importance; the *purpose* of a parable was that upon which attention was concentrated. It would never have entered the mind of one of our Lord's hearers to worry about the external form of a parable; this was merely the casket for the purpose of holding the treasure; the form or character of the casket was of no matter, was not even considered, in view of the real thing within it. In writing about this parable Montefiore says: "Here we have a very simple illustration of a true parable. The details are not to be pressed or allegorized. We must not inquire: Was the man justified in concealing his find? The whole point of the parable is the joy with which the man finds the treasure, and his abandonment of everything else in order to secure it. So must each individual sacrifice everything else in order to obtain the highest good, the Kingdom of God."<sup>1</sup> It is just the pressing and allegorizing of the details of a parable which often obscure its meaning; this learned Jew knows better.

The kernel of the parable of the Hidden Treasure is that a man placed an enormous value on what he found, a value not only greater than *anything* he possessed, but greater than *everything* he possessed. The idea of selling all that one possesses in order to gain something of pre-eminent value was a familiar one among Jewish teachers; it is said by one of them, for example: "On anywise let a man sell all that he has so that he may be able to marry the daughter of one learned [in the Law]; for then, when he dies, or has to go into exile, he may be assured that his sons will be pupils of those learned [in the Law]."<sup>2</sup> More pointed is the following story from the Talmud: "Rabbi Jochanan<sup>3</sup> was going from Tiberias up to Sepphoris, while leaning on the shoulder of Rabbi Chijja ben Abba. They came into a field-plot. He said: 'That used to belong to me, but I sold it in order that I might be able to occupy myself with the Law [Torah].'

<sup>1</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels*, ii. 644 (1909).

<sup>2</sup> Bab. Talm. *Pesachim* 49 a, quoted by Fiebig, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

<sup>3</sup> He died in A.D. 279.

They came into a field of olives. He said: 'This field of olives used to belong to me, but I sold it in order that I might be able to occupy myself with the Law.' Thereupon did Rabbi Chijja ben Abba begin to weep, and spoke: 'I weep because thou hast left nothing in reserve for thy old age.' He answered: 'Chijja, my son, Chijja, my son, is it a small thing in thine eyes that I sold something that was created in six days [see Exod. xxxi. 17], and in place thereof gained that which was given in forty days and forty nights?' [see Exod. xxxiv. 28: "And he was there with the Lord for forty days and forty nights," in reference to the giving of the Law].<sup>1</sup> When it is remembered what the Law was to the devout Jew, the appropriateness of this passage in the present connexion will be realized. To the Rabbis, the Torah "contained, as it were, the Kingdom of God within itself. By studying and serving the Torah, by practising it and fulfilling its laws, the Israelite both accepted and took upon himself the glad yoke of the Kingdom; he widened the range of the Kingdom, and, in the eschatological sense, he brought the advent of the Kingdom nearer."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the idea of sacrificing everything in order to possess something of pre-eminent value was not unfamiliar to Jewish teachers; but, in spite of Montefiore's eloquent words just quoted, it may be doubted whether the Jews who listened to our Lord's words had ever heard of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth spoken of in this way. Their conception of the Kingdom, as we have seen, was utterly different; they had never thought of it as a possession. The idea of belonging to the Kingdom was familiar enough; but that of possessing it as a treasure more valuable than anything else, of giving up everything for the sake of it,—that was new.

In the parable of the Hidden Treasure, then, our Lord put before His disciples something which they found difficult to understand, viz. the Kingdom of Heaven on earth from the point of view of its value; and He tells them, in effect, that it is worth more than everything else in the world put

<sup>1</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 817, it is from *Pesikta* 178 b.

<sup>2</sup> Montefiore, *Rabbinic Lit.* . . . , p. 254.



together. It is in the light of this truth that one must understand such words as: "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor" (Matth. xix. 21); "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk. ix. 62).

It is a question of values; most men appraise wrongly; evidently the disciples did; that is why our Lord uttered this parable of the value of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The parable of the *Pearl of Great Price* (Matth. xiii. 45, 46) teaches the same truth: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."

Here, too, it is a question of values; but while in the former parable the Kingdom of Heaven is thought of rather from the point of view of the valuable use to be gained by its possession, in this parable it is regarded from the point of view of its intrinsic value, and of its pure beauty. In the East in ancient times the pearl was looked upon as the most precious of all possessions, the mere contemplation of which was a delight, while the actual possession of it was a permanent source of happiness. In the Talmud it is often spoken of as that which is beyond price, its value cannot be estimated. In the Midrash *Bereshith Rabba* v. 21 it is said that the garments of Adam and Eve were "smooth like the onyx and beautiful as pearls."

Our Lord teaches thus the value and the beauty of the Kingdom of Heaven, that it is, therefore, the sum-total of the spiritual possessions which, through Him, are given to men. The Kingdom, therefore, is not Christ Himself, and the hidden treasure and the pearl do not represent Him; but He is the means of possessing, as well as the giver of, these, which represent righteousness, lovingkindness, purity, joy, peace—everything, in fact, which comes through forgiveness of sins, and which is the heavenly heritage.

These possessions are not tangible, not easily obtained; they are hidden, and can easily be missed; until one day they are found, and their glorious value is realized. And the treasure is discovered in more ways than one. To some



it is revealed in its undreamed-of value quite unexpectedly, as the parable of the Hidden Treasure suggests. Others seek it with zeal and energy until they gain possession of it, as in the parable of the Pearl. But there is something else which these parables teach: such is the value of this possession that it makes immense claims on him who would have it for his own; he can possess it only if he is able to sacrifice everything else. The disciples thought that when the Kingdom of Heaven should come all the Chosen People would, as a matter of course, share in its blessings. They had to learn otherwise. Here were some other "mysteries" of the Kingdom of Heaven which were hard for them to understand.<sup>1</sup>

### THE PARABLE OF THE DRAW-NET

[Matth. xiii. 47-50]

While there is a certain parallelism between this parable and that of the Wheat and the Tares, they differ in this, that the separating of the bad from the good takes place at once in the former, while in the latter it is not until the "harvest." The repetition of the fact that bad as well as good elements must exist in the Kingdom during the period of its development seems to imply that the disciples found some difficulty in accepting this truth. This parable would have brought it home to them, since several of them, at least, had the picture of what they had often experienced set before them; and, doubtless, when they recalled their experiences as those who were "fishers of men" (Matth. iv. 19), the truth conveyed by the parable would have received confirmation.

Of the three kinds of nets for fishing<sup>2</sup> mentioned in the Bible, that here spoken of is the most appropriate on account of its large size, capable of enclosing all manner of fishes. Of this net Thomson says: "Then there is the great drag-net, the working of which teaches the value of united effort.

<sup>1</sup> For a somewhat different interpretation of these two parables, see Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 112 f.

<sup>2</sup> σαγήνη = *mikmereth* (Isa. xix. 8; Hab. i. 15; Matth. xiii. 47); δίκτυον = *cherem* (Ezek. xxvi. 5, xlvii. 10; Hab. i. 16; Matth. iv. 20; Lk. v. 4; John xxi. 6), a general term for fishing-net; ἀμφίβληστρον = *mezodah* (Eccles. ix. 12; Matth. iv. 18); in Matth. iv. 18, 20 the last two are used indiscriminately.

Some must row the boat, some cast out the net; some on shore pull the rope with all their strength; others throw stones and beat the water, to prevent the fish from escaping; and as it approaches the shore, every one is active in holding up the edges, drawing it to land, and seizing the fish. This is that net which gathers 'of every kind,' and, when drawn to the shore, the fishermen sit down and collect 'the good into vessels, but cast the bad away.' I have watched this operation throughout a hundred times along the shore of the Mediterranean."<sup>1</sup> The need of so many hands in using this large net explains the mention of the "hired servants" in Mk. i. 20.

The central thought of the parable is contained in the words: "which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach"; this gathering in of all and sundry occurs elsewhere in the parables; thus, in the parable of the Great Supper the master of the house says to his servant: "Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor and maimed and blind and lame" (Lk. xiv. 21); and again: "Go out into the highways and hedges, and constrain them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Lk. xiv. 23). Similarly in Mk. ii. 17 our Lord says: "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners," *i.e.* the great mass. That was a thought distasteful to the disciples; in very truth, a "mystery"; but in later days its beauty was realized: "... God our Saviour, who willeth that all men should be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth" (i Tim. ii. 3, 4).

The concluding words of this parable (verses 49, 50), it may safely be said, do not belong to it in its original form; they are taken, almost verbally, from the conclusion of the parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matth. xiii. 40-42).

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X In summing up this cycle of the parables of the Kingdom, McNeile remarks that "they appear to belong to the period after the Lord's first preaching of the near approach of the Kingdom, and the beginning of the hostility of the religious authorities (Matth. ix. 1-8; xii.), and before the final

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*: Central Palestine and Phœnicia, p. 348 (1883).

rupture with them (Matth. xv. 1-20). He seems to be describing His own experiences. He and the disciples had preached with varying success (Sower and Drag-net); the failures had been due to the opposing influence of the devil (Tares); but, nevertheless, the preaching had brought to earth the beginnings of a development which would end in the splendid consummation (Mustard Seed and Leaven), to share in which is a prize worth any sacrifice (Treasure and Pearl).”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 204.





OTHER PARABLES CONCERNING THE  
KINGDOM OF HEAVEN



## LECTURE VI

### THE PARABLE OF THE UNFORGIVING DEBTOR

[Matth. xviii. 23-35]

### AND THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

[Matth. xx. 1-16]

THE first of these parables was called forth by St. Peter's question: "Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Until seven times?" Its opening words: "Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened unto . . ." mean that he who would belong to the Kingdom of Heaven must be one whose forgiveness for wrongs committed against him is unlimited.

Before we deal with the parable itself, our Lord's words in reply to St. Peter's question must be considered: "I say not unto thee, Until seven times; but, Until seventy times seven." It seems probable that, in the first instance, our Lord uttered these words as a contrast to Gen. iv. 24: "If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold," with the object of teaching that the natural craving which men have for revenge must, for those who would belong to the Kingdom, be changed to an equal desire to forgive. In this connexion the Rabbinical teaching on forgiveness should be noted, for it was part of the doctrinal environment in which our Lord grew up, and cannot have been unknown to Him. The utterances on this subject which find expression in Rabbinical literature are for the most part traditional and go back to a time long before they were written down.

A saying which has been frequently quoted or referred to occurs in the Talmud (*Yoma* 86 *b*), it is attributed to Rabbi Jose ben Jehuda, who lived about A.D. 180, and is to the

following effect: "If a man commits a transgression once, one forgives him; if a second time, one forgives him; if a third time, one forgives him; if a fourth time, one does not forgive him; see Amos ii. 4: 'Thus saith Yahweh, For three transgressions of Judah, yea, for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof. . . .'" This has been interpreted as meaning that one must forgive three times before taking vengeance; and it has been asserted that the Rabbi's taught that a man need forgive three times only. This is a mistake, for the passage quoted does not refer to men's forgiving one another, but to God's forgiveness; the indefinite expression, "one," is used very often in Rabbinical literature for "God," in order, for reasons of reverence, to avoid mentioning the divine name.<sup>1</sup>

To appreciate the Rabbinical teaching about forgiveness between man and man, we must look, apart from some notable passages in the Old Testament, first to some of the post-biblical, but pre-Christian, Jewish writings, for these reflect the attitude of the best teachers. Ben-Sira says:

"Forgive an injury (done thee) by thy neighbour.  
And then, when thou prayest, thy sins will be forgiven.  
One man cherisheth wrath against another,  
And doth he seek healing from the Lord?  
Upon a man like himself he hath no mercy  
And for his own sins doth he make supplication?"  
(Ecclus. xxviii. 2-4).

This was written about two centuries before the time of our Lord. In another ancient Jewish writing, belonging to about 100 B.C., occur these striking words: "Love ye one another from the heart; and if a man sin against thee, speak peaceably to him, and in thy soul hold not guile. And if he repent and confess, forgive him. . . . But if he be shameless, and persisteth in his wrongdoing, even so forgive him from the heart, and leave to God the avenging" (*Test. xii. Patriarchs*: Gad. vi. 3 ff.). The same spirit is found among the later teachers; an ancient saying runs: "Who is mightiest of the mighty? He who makes his

<sup>1</sup> This is also mentioned by Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 797.



enemy his friend.”<sup>1</sup> An early, but unnamed teacher, spoke thus: “There are four types of character regarding disposition: (1) He who is easily provoked and easily pacified; his loss is cancelled by his gain. (2) He who is hard to provoke and hard to pacify; his gain is cancelled by his loss. (3) He who is hard to provoke and easily pacified; he is a pious one (*Chasid*). (4) He who is easily provoked, and hard to pacify; he is a wicked man.”<sup>2</sup>

One more illustration may be given: “Ever shall a man bestow lovingkindness, even on one who does evil unto him; he shall not be vengeful, nor bear a grudge. This is the way of Israel.”<sup>3</sup>

It is only right that the Jewish conception of forgiveness should thus be briefly set forth, if only to show that Judaism at its best coincided with our Lord’s teaching on this point.

We turn now to the parable:

“Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened unto a certain king, which would make a reckoning with his servants.”

It would be more strictly in accordance with the Greek to express the words thus: “Therefore hath the Kingdom of Heaven become like unto a certain king”; it is the consequence arising out of what Christ had said to St. Peter. To our Western ways of expression, this formula, or something similar, which is frequently used in introducing parables, is inexact; to the Oriental, as has already been pointed out, logical exactitude is quite unnecessary. Put in a modern form of expression, what this phrase conveyed to our Lord’s hearers was something of this kind: “As a result of what I have just been saying to you, your conception of him who would belong to the Kingdom must be changed; the character of the Kingdom of Heaven, *i.e.* those of whom it is composed, as illustrated by the subject of forgiveness, differs from Peter’s idea of, ‘How often’; it is, on the contrary, such as will be illustrated by this parable.” But the thoroughly Jewish method of setting

<sup>1</sup> *Aboth de R. Nathan*, xxiii, quoted by Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, First Series, p. 164 (1917).

<sup>2</sup> *Pirke Aboth*, v. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Midrash *Le’olam*, ch. vii, quoted by Abrahams, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

forth parables is further observable; from St. Peter's words, which called forth the parable, we should expect it to describe a man who was constantly being annoyed and wronged by another, and who as often turned and forgave. Instead of this, however, not only does the parable begin with what is the picture of divine forgiveness to the sinner, but it describes one who just does *not* do what, from the preamble, one would expect. But who with any sense of the essence of things would cavil at the fact that the negative side of the truth was presented rather than the positive which was expected? This precisely illustrates the Jewish method of disregarding logic so long as truth, from one point or another, is pressed home. A more effective proof of the genuineness of the parable could hardly be looked for.

Another Jewish trait occurs in the opening words of this parable: "Therefore is the Kingdom of Heaven likened unto a certain king" (cf. Matth. xxii. 2; Lk. xiv. 31); a king as the chief personage is a common feature in Jewish parables; in one belonging to the end of the first century of our era, for example, it is said: "... With what is the matter to be compared? It is to be compared with a man who lent his neighbour a mina,<sup>1</sup> and fixed a time (for repayment) in the presence of the king. And he took an oath by the life of the king. The time (for repayment) arrived, but he did not repay him. Then he came to make his peace with the king. And the king said to him: the offence against me is forgiven. Go and make thy peace with thy neighbour. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

But to continue: the phrase "to make a reckoning" (*συναίρειν λόγον*, cf. Matth. xxv. 19) was a common one during the early centuries of Christianity among Greek-speaking people,<sup>3</sup> it occurs on many papyri. The use of the word *δοῦλοι* for the servants of the king is not without interest, being a realistic Oriental trait. As it means "bond-

<sup>1</sup> Roughly about £3 10s. of our money.

<sup>2</sup> Fiebig, *op. cit.*, p. 60; see also the same writer's *Altjüdische Gleichnisse und die Gleichnisse Jesu* (1904), where many other examples are given.

<sup>3</sup> See Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten*, p. 80 (1908), and a number of instances are given in Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, p. 601 (1928). The Hebrew equivalent ליתן חשבון "to render an account," is common in Rabbinical literature (Jastrow, *Talmud Dictionary* i. 509 a).

servants," it would at first sight seem inappropriate to be applied to those who, judging from the large sums of money administered by them, must have been thought of as important State functionaries; but when it is considered that all the subjects, even the highest, of an Oriental despot were regarded as his slaves, it will be realized that this word applied to the servant reflects real conditions.

"And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents." The mention of such a sum as owing by a bond-servant is another Jewish trait intended to express something that was limitless; ten thousand talents would represent something approaching two and a half millions sterling. According to Josephus, the provinces of Judæa, Idumæa, and Samaria, paid in taxes in his day six hundred talents a year; Galilee and Persia paid two hundred.<sup>1</sup> For an individual, therefore, to owe ten thousand talents is out of the question. Obviously, this is not meant to be taken in a literal sense any more than the "seventy times seven." It is meant to express the limitless nature of divine forgiveness of offences against God.

"But forasmuch as he had not wherewith to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." This was in accordance with Jewish law (Exod. xxii. 3; Lev. xxv. 39); a man who could not pay his debts might be sold as a slave, though the harshness of this law was mitigated by that of the year of jubilee when the debtor was granted liberty again (Lev. xxv. 40, 41). That an insolvent debtor's children, if not his wife, were sold into bondage is clear from 2 Kgs. iv. 1, where the widow says to Elisha: "... the creditor is come to take unto him my two children to be bondmen" (see also Neh. v. 5). In the parable there was, of course, no possibility that the debt could be paid by this means; it was simply the only way whereby even an infinitesimal restitution could be made. But the point is important as representing how impossible it is for man to make any adequate amends for "debts" owed to, *i.e.* trespasses against, God.

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq.*, xvii. 318, 319.

“The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all.”

At first an altogether strange remark, for what conceivable possibility was there of the huge debt ever being repaid? We must guard ourselves against reading into the text things that are not there; yet one cannot help asking whether these words, “I will pay thee all,” may not reflect a condition of mind which is very human; there is no man so blindly optimistic regarding his affairs as a debtor; however involved he may be, he is always in hopes that something may turn up; ways and means, possible and impossible, suggest themselves; all that is wanted is time; “have patience with me!”

“And the lord of that servant, being moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”

There is no thought of all the carelessness and folly that had reduced the debtor to his hopeless condition; no word of rebuke for his callousness in not considering the wrong done to him whose affairs he was supposed to have been administering; or of his utter lack of the sense of duty of which he had been guilty. But the moral and spiritual condition of the lord implied, is clearly intentional, for, as we have seen, to set forth the illimitableness of God’s forgiveness is one of the main purposes of the parable. The king represents the Heavenly Father, who is “moved with compassion” at man’s self-deception, thoughtlessness, and sinfulness; He forgives all. In His divine mercy God takes man as he is, with all his sin and all his forgetfulness of sin, and freely pardons him, requiring only this one thing of him—that he should, in his small way, do the same to others, since therein lay the earnest of repentance, the indispensable condition of divine forgiveness. There is a beautiful passage in the Jerusalem Talmud, which may be appropriately quoted here:

“They asked Wisdom, ‘What is the punishment of the sinner?’ Wisdom answered, ‘Evil pursues sinners’ (Prov. xiii. 21). They asked Prophecy, ‘What is the punishment of the sinner?’ Prophecy answered, ‘The soul that



sinneth, it shall die' (Ezek. xviii. 4). They asked the Torah, 'What is the punishment of the sinner?' Torah answered, 'Let him bring a guilt offering and it shall be forgiven unto him, as it is said, And it shall be accepted for him to make atonement for him' (Lev. i. 4). They asked the Holy One, Blessed be He, 'What is the punishment of the sinner?' The Holy One, Blessed be He, answered, 'Let him do repentance, and it shall be forgiven unto him.'"<sup>1</sup>

"But that servant went out, and found one of his fellow-servants, which owed him a hundred pence; and he laid hold on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay what thou owest."

Here it is to be noticed that, so far as Roman law was concerned, the servant was acting according to his rights in the treatment of his fellow-servant; "brutal as this treatment was, yet, like the original command of the king, it was fully in accordance with the law. To clutch a debtor by the collar of his toga, and to drag him, with the sensation of being throttled, to prison (*obtrecto collo aliquem rapere*, Livius iv. 53) was legal custom; it was, according to Pricæus, *de juris creditoribus solemniter usurpatum*, and the Greek expression for this was just ἀποπνίγειν τοὺς ὀφείλοντας."<sup>2</sup> As to Jewish law, he was acting in accordance with custom; thus, in Prov. vi 1-5 one who has become a debtor is advised to deliver himself from his creditor "as a roe from a snare,"<sup>3</sup> as a bird from the hand of the fowler"; elsewhere the debtor is spoken of as the bond-slave of his creditor (Prov. xxii. 7); and the warning is given to a debtor in the words: "If thou hast not wherewith to pay, why should he take thy bed from under thee?" (Prov. xxii. 27). Thus, the servant was acting according to Jewish custom in exacting payment; but, it must be added, custom had overridden, and made nugatory, the benevolent laws of earlier ages; in the ancient Hebrew codes no provision is made for the recovery of debt; though we get in

<sup>1</sup> Jer. Talmud, *Makkoth* 31 d; quoted by Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 293 (1909).

<sup>2</sup> Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> Emended text, the Hebrew is corrupt.

such a passage as Ps. xxxvii. 21: "The wicked man borroweth, and payeth not again"; if that happened often it was natural enough that creditors, to protect themselves, introduced precedents which in course of time became custom, and thus came to have the effect of law.

The smallness of the fellow-servant's debt, a "hundred pence," or *denaria* (= about four pounds sterling) reflects, of course, the underlying thought of the smallness that man is called upon to forgive his fellow-creatures in comparison with the illimitable scope of divine forgiveness.

"So his fellow-servant fell down and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee."

In this case the request for patience had some meaning, and the creditor had no cause to think that he would not be paid; for the debt was very small.

"But he would not; but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay that which was due."

Deissmann draws attention to an interesting parallel to this casting into prison for debt; it occurs on a papyrus dated A.D. 85; on this it is told of how a creditor was summoned before the governor for having imprisoned his debtor, an honourable man, and his wives; the governor says that the creditor is worthy of being scourged, but delivers him to the multitude.<sup>1</sup>

"So when his fellow-servants saw what was done, they were exceeding sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done."

One cause of their grief may well have been the sight of their fellow-servant's misfortune, though that could easily have been remedied by a little help from them; and in this case there would have been no need to come and tell their lord what had been done; it is far more likely that what is intended to be understood is that their sorrow was caused by the cruel and unforgiving behaviour of one of their own company. We might have expected that some expression of indignation on their part would also have been mentioned; that that is not the case has its reasons: the creditor was but insisting on his rights, and acting in accordance with

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 193 f.

the law; under the circumstances any other of the fellow-servants might have done the same; in any case, they had not been injured; they might regret their fellow-servant's cruel act, but it was not for them to show anger. In their sorrow and perplexity, they lay the whole matter before their lord.

"Then his lord called him unto him, and saith unto him, Thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou besoughtest me; shouldest thou not also have had mercy on thy fellow-servant, even as I had mercy on thee?"

Noticeable are the words: "because thou besoughtest me"; justice would have demanded either that the debt should be paid, or that the wickedness and folly should have been deservedly punished. But it is the simple request for forgiveness that releases him from all the consequences of evil actions. That, as the parable teaches, is God's way. A similar thought about the difference between God's dealings and man's, though expressed in another way, occurs in a Jewish parable: "Come and see what a difference there is between the action of the sons of men and the way that God acts. If a man owes another two hundred, or ten thousand, or three hundred *zuz*,<sup>1</sup> and the latter says, 'Give me that which is mine,' and the debtor says, 'I have nothing'; immediately a quarrel arises, and they begin abusing one another. But it is not so with God. . . ." <sup>2</sup>

"And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due."

The phrase "and delivered him to the tormentors" reads harshly, and in all probability does not represent the original words; the Old Syriac version, belonging, according to Burkitt, to about the year A.D. 200,<sup>3</sup> reads: "and delivered him up that he might be scourged until he should repay all the debt";<sup>4</sup> the expression is, moreover, apocalyptic

<sup>1</sup> The fourth part of shekel, roughly equivalent, therefore, to rather less than a shilling of our money. A *zuz* is the same as a *denar*.

<sup>2</sup> *Tanchuma* 97 a, quoted by Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 800.

<sup>3</sup> *Encycl. Bibl.*, iv. 5003.

<sup>4</sup> See Burkitt's translation, *Evangelion Da-Mepharreshe* (1904).

(cp. Rev. xiv. 10, 11; xviii. 7, 10, 15; xx. 10), whereas the parable is dealing with the conditions of time. It looks as though this expression were due to a later editor who wished to bring in an eschatological trait. But, however that may be, when our Lord teaches in this parable the unlimited forgiveness of God, that does not imply that the hardened sinner is not to be punished; for that may be the only means of bringing him to a better frame of mind; indeed, that seems to be implied by the words, "till he should pay all that was due."

"So shall also my heavenly Father do unto you, if ye forgive not every one his brother from your heart."

With these words compare Matth. v. 7; vi. 12, 14, 15; Mk. xi. 25; James ii. 13. When, then, the parable begins with: "the Kingdom of Heaven is like," it means that those who would belong to the Kingdom must forgive injuries done to them. This parable, therefore, does not deal with any "mystery" concerning the Kingdom.

#### THE PARABLE OF THE LABOURERS IN THE VINEYARD

[Matth. xx. 1-16]

This parable, as we now have it, is enclosed within two texts which form, as it were, the title and the conclusion: "But many shall be last that are first, and first that are last" (Matth. xix. 30); "So the last shall be first, and the first last" (Matth. xx. 16); words to the same effect, in slightly different form, occur in Mk. x. 31 (cp. ix. 35); Lk. xiii. 30; and one of the *New Oxyrhynchus Sayings* of our Lord has the form identical with Matth. xix. 30. Two interpretations of the saying are: those who are at the present first in position or wealth will be last in the Kingdom; or else, those who believe themselves to be the first in point of righteousness will find that those whom they regarded as sinners will prove to be more righteous than they in the Kingdom. It is probable, as we shall see, that, read in the light of the parable, they have a somewhat different meaning.

For the understanding of this parable, and not for this



one only, it must be read in connexion with its context. The parable itself is contained in Matth. xx. 1-15; but the entire section xix. 16-xx. 16 forms a complete whole. In the Revised Version it will be seen that no break is made at the end of chap. xix, indicating that the whole section must be read together. The sequence of events in this section is, briefly, as follows: A certain man comes to our Lord and asks what he must do to attain eternal life. In reply, he is told to keep the commandments. He protests that he has kept all the commandments; and he adds: "What lack I yet?" Our Lord answers that he must, if he would be perfect, sell all that he has, and give it to the poor. But when the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. This occasions the words which follow, in which Christ says how difficult it is for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven: "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye,<sup>1</sup> than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." The words are meant to express the idea of impossibility; something similar occurs in the Talmud in reference to those who boast of their cleverness, there it is ironically said: "Thou hast presumably come from Pumbeditha<sup>2</sup> where they can make an elephant go through the eye of a needle."<sup>3</sup>

The proverb uttered by our Lord introduces what the parable is intended to teach; for, in reply to the question, "Who then can be saved?" our Lord says: "With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible." There follow then the words of St. Peter: "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee, what then shall we have?" These words are the immediate cause which called forth the parable; for, in reply, our Lord speaks first of the reward which shall be accorded to all who have given up anything for His sake: "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands,

<sup>1</sup> In a different connexion this expression is used in the Bab. Talm. (*Pesikta* 163 b): "God spoke to the Israelites, 'show me an opening of repentance as large as a needle's eye, and I will open for you gates through which waggons and carts can pass.'"

<sup>2</sup> In Babylonia, where an important Jewish Academy existed in the third century A.D.

<sup>3</sup> *Baba Mezia*, 38 b, quoted in Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 828.

for my sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit eternal life"; then follows, without a break: "But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last. For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a householder . . ."; these words, with the parable that follows, are our Lord's reply to St. Peter's question: "What then shall we have?" For these words imply that he had a right to expect a reward for his good and self-denying act in having forsaken all and followed Christ; and with this Christ entirely agrees; right doing deserves reward and shall receive reward; but St. Peter and the disciples had yet to learn that all the good works in the world were insufficient, of themselves, for a man to attain eternal life.

→ For the proper understanding of the parable that follows it is quite indispensable that we should briefly examine the doctrine of works as taught by the Jewish religious teachers in the time of our Lord.

What is demanded here is that a proper sense of proportion should be observed; this has by no means always been the case when non-Jewish scholars have discussed the doctrines of Judaism. In dealing with a subject like this, in regard to which there was unquestionably a difference between the teaching of our Lord and official Judaism, it is essential in the interests of both truth and justice that notice should be taken not only of those Rabbinical utterances which express the dominant Jewish view, but also of those which exhibit an approximation to what our Lord taught. It is easy enough to pick out passages from Rabbinical writings which emphasize the merit of works, and present the Jewish doctrine in glaring opposition to our Lord's teaching; but something more than this is wanted. If it is the fact—and we shall see that it is—that some Jewish teachers held a somewhat different view, their  
 ○ utterances ought also to be noted.

Let us first take a glance at what was undoubtedly the predominant teaching of the Rabbis. It is to be expected that among a people who regarded the Law (*Torah*) as worthy of a veneration second only to that offered to the Almighty, the essence of righteousness should consist in the observance

of the precepts of the Law. The Law, given to Moses, was, in its written and oral form, the revelation of the divine will; to observe its precepts was, therefore, to do the will of God; and what higher ideal could be striven for? Logically enough, what a Jew had to do to become a righteous man was to accumulate *Mitzvôth*, i.e. the commandments of the Law, which, having been fulfilled, he was in a position to expect not only divine approbation, but divine reward, both in this world and the next. "If thou hast learned much Torah," said Rabbi Tarphon,<sup>1</sup> "they [*i.e.* God] give thee much reward; and faithful is the Master of thy work, who will pay thee the reward of thy work; and know that the recompence of the reward of the righteous is for the time to come,"<sup>2</sup> *i.e.* the Hereafter. This well-known passage is quite in accordance with the first part of our Lord's teaching, *i.e.* that there is a reward for those who do what is right.

Then, further, the accumulation of *Mitzvôth* could be effected in various ways. It could be done by the literal carrying-out of legal precepts; for example, every individual act of Sabbath observance, every time the phylacteries were put on ("laid" is the technical term), every act of charity, every prayer, every fast, and so on,—all these acts were so many *Mitzvôth* to a man's credit. Besides this, the *intention* to fulfil a commandment or a precept, without actually accomplishing it, was reckoned as though it had been done; on the other hand, the desire to do an evil deed was not accounted a breach of the Law so long as it was not actually carried out. Evil thoughts were not regarded as sinful if they did not result in an evil act; but putting an evil thought out of the mind was, fittingly enough, reckoned to a man's credit. Therefore, finally, *Mitzvôth* could be further accumulated by refraining from evil. Every time a man was in danger of committing a sin, and withstood the danger, it was reckoned as a good deed, and therefore so much to his credit. With the exception that evil thoughts were not regarded as sinful if they did not issue in an evil deed, there is nothing in all this which is incompatible with

<sup>1</sup> He lived about A.D. 130.

<sup>2</sup> Mishna, *Aboth*, ii. 19 (20).



the teaching of Christ. But there were some other elements in the Jewish doctrine of a somewhat different nature. It was manifestly impossible for anyone to live wholly without sin; that was realized; it, therefore, became the aim of every man who wished to be reckoned among the righteous, to accumulate good deeds to such an extent that their number would be sure to outweigh his evil deeds. So that, in effect, it came to this: when a man could show that his good deeds, *i.e.* observance of legal precepts, etc., as indicated above, were in excess of his evil deeds, he could claim to be reckoned among the righteous, otherwise he had to reckon himself among the sinners. This, to be sure, is putting the matter somewhat baldly; but, in principle, it came to be a question of a balance between good and evil deeds.

The point of cardinal doctrinal importance, however, was the relationship which was believed to exist between God and the man who had accumulated many good deeds to his credit, *i.e.* the righteous man; this may be briefly stated thus: the righteous man was said to be in a state of justification in the sight of God; therefore he was in a position to claim his reward from God. Works were meritorious, and therefore the accumulation of works placed a man in a state of justification in the sight of God; and he who was justified in the sight of God had, as a result, the right of reward; he could, in other words, claim his reward from God. That, we trust, is a not unfair statement regarding the dominant Jewish doctrine of works in the time of our Lord. It cannot be denied that, judged by human standards, it is a just and logical scheme. Nevertheless, it is precisely against this doctrine that the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard is directed. It is the doctrine that drew from St. Paul, following the teaching of Christ, such words as: "By the works of the law shall no flesh be accounted righteous [*i.e.* justified] in his [God's] sight" (Rom. iii. 20; cp. Gal. ii. 16); "We reckon, therefore, that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law" (Rom. iii. 28); "Not of works, that no man should glory" (Eph. ii. 9).

It was stated above that there were those among the Jewish



teachers who uttered sayings somewhat different from the generally accepted view. Here is one which might have come from the lips of St. Paul: "If thou hast learnt much Torah, ascribe not any merit to thyself, for thereunto wast thou created"; this is a saying of Jochanan ben Zakkai<sup>1</sup> (*Aboth* ii. 9); there arises at once in the mind the words: "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Lk. xvii. 10). In the same tractate occurs the saying of Antigonus of Socho<sup>2</sup>: "Be not like slaves who minister unto (their) lord on condition of receiving a reward; but be like unto slaves who minister unto (their) lord without (expecting) to receive a reward; and let the fear of Heaven be upon you."<sup>3</sup>

A true sense of proportion is observable in Akiba's saying: "The world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the amount of work";<sup>4</sup> the divine incentive comes first, it is for man to make the full use of it. Quite in the same spirit is an ancient prayer of the Synagogue, offered at the daily Morning Service: "Sovereign of all worlds! Not because of our righteous acts do we lay our supplications before thee, but because of thine abundant mercies! What are we? What is our piety? What is our righteousness? . . ."<sup>5</sup> Again, in the Midrash, *Debarim Rabba* in the comment on Deut. iii. 23 ("And I besought the Lord"), Rabbi Jochanan is quoted as saying: "From this thou canst learn that the creature can claim nothing from his Creator [*i.e.* that he can make no claim upon Him, but can only supplicate for grace]; for behold, Moses, the greatest of all the prophets, came only with the language of supplication (to God)."<sup>6</sup> Montefiore, who also quotes this, gives among others, these quotations from the *Midrash Tehillim* (Midrash on the Psalms), which further illustrate this side of the Rabbinic

<sup>1</sup> He was president of the new Sanhedrin established at Jabne (Jamnia) after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; he was then an old man.

<sup>2</sup> He lived during the first half of the third century B.C.; Socho is mentioned as a city in Judæa in Josh. xv. 35; i Sam. xvii. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Pirke Aboth*, i. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, iii. 20.

<sup>5</sup> *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Empire*, pp. 7 f. (1912).

<sup>6</sup> Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Debarim Rabba*, p. 18 (1882).

doctrine concerning grace and works: On Ps. iv. 1 ("Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness") the comment is: "The congregation of Israel prays before God and says, It is for thee, O God, to justify me; if there is no merit in me, act towards me in charity." Ps. xlv. 1 ("We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, what work thou didst in their days, in the days of old") is thus explained: "Not for their works were the Israelites redeemed from Egypt, but so that God might make himself an eternal name, and because of his favour (or grace)." <sup>1</sup>

It will thus be seen that there is another side to the Rabbinic doctrine of works, and unless this is taken into consideration we shall be doing an injustice to many ancient Jewish teachers, and we shall visualize but inadequately the Jewish mental environment in which the beginnings of Christianity grew up, so far as this important subject is concerned. Nobody would deny the distinctiveness, and in many directions the uniqueness, of our Lord's teaching; but that He utilized the teaching and methods familiar to His hearers when these coincided with His own views does not admit of doubt. Here in this parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard He was dealing with a matter of vital practical religious importance concerning which a dangerously false emphasis on the value of works was taught by the great majority of Jewish teachers; but in combatting this our Lord cannot have failed to recognize among the teachers who were constantly arguing with Him some whose views accorded with His teaching; not, of course, that this would make any difference when He was contraverting what was false in the dominant teaching; we wish only to insist that, in studying the parables of our Lord from the point of view of their Jewish background and environment, all the facts to which the evidence points should be recognized.

We turn now again to the parable itself. When St. Peter said: "What then shall we have?" he clearly implied that he had a right to claim his reward, since he had left all and followed Christ. In reply to this, our Lord tells him that there is a reward for all who give up anything for His sake,

<sup>1</sup> *Rabbinic Literature* . . . , pp. 361 ff.

but He adds: "But many shall be last that are first; and first that are last; for the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is a householder . . .," and the parable follows. So that, as already pointed out, there is a close connexion between the parable and the events which precede its utterance. This becomes still clearer from the parable when its two outstanding themes are considered; indeed, the whole teaching of the parable is contained in them:

(i) The householder is represented as one in an independent position from the point of view of the labourers; in other words, he does not need their labour in the way that they need their wages. This fact is obvious when one considers the conditions of the time; the relative positions between rich and poor, employer and employed, were utterly different from those of more modern times. The labourer standing idle in the market-place because no work was offered him had nothing to fall back upon but uncertain charitable gifts; the difference between the conditions of ancient and modern times is further emphasized by the words: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own?" Since, therefore, the householder is wholly independent of the individual labourers, the advantage of each one being employed is theirs. Each individual labourer must consider himself privileged in being employed and being thus placed in a position in which he is able to earn wages. That is to say, the householder confers a benefit on the individual labourer by employing him; it is an act of grace on his part.

(ii) The second point is the unusual proceeding of giving the same payment to the labourers whether they had worked all day or only for an hour. The murmuring of those who had worked a number of hours is quite comprehensible, for under ordinary circumstances they would rightly feel justified in expecting that each would receive payment in accordance with the amount of time given to the work. It has been urged in reply to this that since each labourer had made his own arrangement with the householder, it was no concern of his what the others received. Nevertheless, it must be allowed that in the ordinary conditions of



life it is manifestly unfair for the man who has worked all day to receive no better payment than he who has worked for one hour only. But the whole purpose of this parable was to set before men conditions which are just *not* those of everyday life; for it tells of the relationship between men and God, not that between men and men.

To explain the parable in the sense that it teaches that the quality of work done is of more value than the quantity is to miss the whole point of it; besides, there is nothing to show, in the wording of the parable, that the work of those labourers who had toiled all day was in any way inferior in quality to that of those who had worked less. There is an interesting Jewish parable which deals with the quantity of work done; this is worth quoting if but to show how differently a parable must be constructed, which sets forth this truth, from one which teaches higher truths. This parable, belonging as we now have it to the middle of the third century A.D. is as follows: “. . . It is like a king who hired many labourers. And there was one labourer who understood his work beyond measure well. What did the king do? He caused him to accompany him as he strolled along many pathways. When evening was come those labourers drew near to receive their wage; and he gave each the full amount of his wage. But the labourers murmured and said, ‘We have toiled the whole day, and this man has toiled but two hours, and yet he has given him the same wage as we have received.’ Then spake the king to them, ‘He has done more work in two hours than ye have during the whole day.’”<sup>1</sup> Here, it is true, all turns on the quantity of work done; but he who can do in two hours what others take a whole day to do must be an admirable worker whose work may be assumed to be superior in quality. But in the parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard it is a question neither of quality nor quantity; the interest of this Jewish parable lies in its similarity in outward form to that of our parable.

The murmuring of the labourers, then, was justified from their point of view; but they are represented as taking no

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem Talmud, *Berakoth*, fol. 5 c, quoted by Fiebig, *op. cit.*, p. 78.



cognizance of the fact of their being employed, and being thus placed in the advantageous position of being able to earn wages, *i.e.* that their being employed was an act of grace on the part of the householder. Doubtless it would be easier for those labourers who had worked for only one hour to realize this; but one and all, the last as well as the first, were partakers of what was a real advantage to them,—the privilege of working for the householder; it was an act of grace accorded to each. Whatever was done in that service, whether little or much, was of subordinate importance as compared with the fact of serving; and the capacity of serving the householder arose only from having been accepted by him.

Briefly, what the parable teaches, then, is this: the householder is entirely independent of the labourers; to say that he needed them for the work in his vineyard is true, but it is implied that there were plenty of other labourers available (verse 7); the fact of his seeking them to work in his vineyard was, therefore, so far as they were concerned, an act of grace on his part. In order to emphasize that it is indeed an act of grace he goes out at various hours of the day to offer the advantage of employment to other labourers, who would otherwise have nothing to do: "Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us." When the time for payment comes, some of the labourers murmur, and claim more payment on account of their having worked longer, but the householder shows that their claim is unjustified: "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? or is thine eye evil because I am good?" (or, "art thou envious because I am generous?"); it is not so much a question of the amount of wages paid, but that of any wages at all being paid, namely, being taken into the householder's service, for this constituted an act of grace on his part. The claim for more implied a right because of work done, whereas the possibility of doing any work at all was the result of an act of grace; and therefore the claim was unjustified.

The application of the parable will then be somewhat as follows: The fact that God accepts the service of men is an

act of grace on His part; for it is wholly for their benefit that men are received into His service. God does not require them; He is altogether independent of the service of men. Nevertheless, God seeks men to serve Him as an act of grace. But if in return men think that they are justified in claiming a reward for their service—"What then shall we have?"—they are losing sight of the great truth that the capacity for doing Him service is due to an act of grace on His part, and that the reward promised is of grace, not due to merit. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you"; "Without me ye can do nothing"; "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do,"—*i.e.* nothing more.

That which is of prime and overwhelming importance is to be taken into the service of God; and since this is an act of grace, the stress is laid, in the parable, upon the *fact* of its taking place, not so much upon when it takes place; for once in that service, the last comer is equally the participant of grace as the first.

There is a Rabbinical parable which, in a somewhat quaint way, illustrates the divine act of grace in taking anyone into His service: "Solomon said to God (1 Kgs. viii. 57), If a king hires good workmen, who do their work well, and the king gives them their hire (reward), what praise has the king (*i.e.* he is only giving the workmen their due)? When (then) is he praised? when he hires lazy workmen, and gives *them* their full hire. So, too, our fathers wrought and received good reward; what goodness (on God's part) was there in that seeing that they wrought and received (their reward)? But we are lazy workers; yet do thou give us good reward. That would be *great* goodness!"<sup>1</sup> The point of the parable is the divine goodness in recompensing men *not* according to their deserts. The good works, in all their inadequacy, which are done in the service of God should lie in the natural order of things; they are, in some sense, analogous to what in ordinary life are the every-

<sup>1</sup> Midrash on Ps. xxvi. 2-4, *Midr. Tehillim* 109 a, quoted by Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 296 (1930).

day and self-evident duties which men carry out because it is the obvious thing to do; similarly, good works, being such as a man should do in the ordinary course of his life, cannot be meritorious,—still less so because the incentive to do them is due to divine grace.

The parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard, then, was not intended to teach that the divine reward is given in accordance with the quality, not the quantity, of work done; nor was its object that of “warning Christ’s first disciples that others who should become His disciples at a later date would also be partakers of privileges equal to theirs who had first joined Him,”<sup>1</sup>—a quite unnecessary warning,—no, its object was much more important and far-reaching than this; it was to show what the relationship between God and man was, or rather, to show more fully what that relationship had always been. No man can, by virtue of his works, claim a reward from God, for the power and the will to do these come from Him—“What hast thou that thou hast not received?”—the initiative is not man’s. No one, therefore, can be justified in the sight of God through his own merit. It is by divine grace that the desire to do good works arises; it is by divine grace that the power to accomplish those works exists; and it is by divine grace that the reward for them is accorded.

<sup>1</sup> Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. Matthew*, p. 214 (1907).

## LECTURE VII

### THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

[Matth. xxi. 28-32]

### THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

[Matth. xxi. 33-46; Mk. xii. 1-12; Lk. xx. 9-19]

### THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

[Matth. xxii. 1-14; cp. Lk. xiv. 16-24]

THIS parable, together with the two which follow (the Wicked Husbandmen and the Wedding Feast), are directed against the Jewish religious leaders who are declared to be unworthy of being members of the Kingdom. They will, therefore, be cast forth from it, while others, whom they despise, will enter in. All three parables are prompted by the events described in the preceding sections (Matth. xxi. 1-27). The full significance of these parables is lost unless they are read in the light of what had previously happened; these events must, therefore, be briefly described.

Our Lord makes His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, being greeted by the multitude as the Messiah: "Hosanna to the son of David . . .," (verse 9, cp. Mk. xi. 9, 10; Lk. xix. 38).<sup>1</sup> There follows the episode of the cleansing of the Temple; and then the healing of the blind and the lame, so that the children cry out in praise of Him. This arouses the wrath of the chief priests and the scribes (verses 12-17). The next day our Lord again enters the Temple and teaches the people there. Hereupon the chief priests and the elders of the people come and ask Him by what authority He does these things; in reply, our Lord asks them whether the baptism of John was from heaven or from men; they profess not to know; whereupon He refuses to answer their question, and then sets forth the parable of the two sons. There are one or two points to be noted here. The events just referred to occurred in

<sup>1</sup> In verse 11, however, we read: "And the multitudes said, This is the prophet, Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."



Jerusalem, under the very eyes, that is to say, of the members of the Sanhedrin; what had happened on the preceding day, and what our Lord had done and said, could not possibly be ignored by the religious authorities: He had been content to receive without protest the adulation of the multitude who had welcomed Him as the Messiah; there was the possibility here of the Jewish authorities becoming involved in difficulties with the Roman power. Further, our Lord had interfered, from their point of view, in an unwarrantable manner, with the customary procedure of those who in the Temple court supplied the wants of worshippers who offered sacrifices; in addition to this, He had usurped, as it would have appeared to the religious authorities, the position of an official teacher by giving instruction to the multitudes in the Temple.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that the Jewish rulers should have taken steps to ascertain from our Lord Himself His aspirations and intentions. Those who come to Him are thoroughly representative: "the chief priests," and "the elders of the people."<sup>1</sup>

The immediate occasion for the first of our three parables was the question about the baptism of John: "The baptism of John, whence was it? from heaven or from men?" (Matth. xxi. 25). We must here recall what the central point was in John's preaching, *i.e.* what his baptism denoted. His primary call was to repentance, the people being baptized, and confessing their sins (Matth. iii. 2, 6). A religious movement such as this the religious leaders of the people had no right to ignore; in fact, at its commencement they were sufficiently impressed to come and hear the Baptist's preaching;<sup>2</sup> but, whatever the reason, they turned their

<sup>1</sup> In verse 15, it is "the chief priests and the scribes" who come to our Lord; in verse 23, it is "the chief priests and the elders of the people"; and in verse 45, "the chief priests and the Pharisees." There is no inconsistency here; in each case the phrase describes members of the Sanhedrin; the chief priests were the spiritual rulers as distinct from the ordinary priests responsible for the Temple services; the elders were the representatives of "the congregation of Israel"; and the scribes were the teachers, representing the learned circles versed in the Scriptures and the Oral Law. The elders and scribes might or might not be Pharisees.

<sup>2</sup> Matth. (iii. 7) alone mentions the Pharisees as coming to John; but Lk. vii. 30 seems to imply that they came.

backs on the movement: "And all the people when they heard, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, being not baptized of him" (Lk. vii. 29, 30); "For John came, neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil" (Matth. xi. 18);<sup>1</sup> such an ignoring of one who was preaching the essence of religion was without excuse. As religious leaders the movement was one which they ought to have welcomed; it was an opportunity such as they had never had before of furthering a great religious movement for the spiritual welfare of the people; and it was not as though they had acted in ignorance in their refusal to recognize the Baptist, since by their having come to hear him they knew the purport of his preaching. The plea that they did not know whether the baptism of John was from heaven was manifestly insincere, for one who preached repentance was doing the will of God; they knew that well enough. To show repentance for sin was constantly insisted upon by all the most revered teachers; this is echoed, for example, by Rabbi Eliezer, a first-century Rabbi, who said: "Be converted one day before thy death. Then the disciples of Rabbi Eliezer asked him, 'Does a man know on what day he will die?' He answered them, 'The more should he show repentance seeing that he might die on the morrow, then will he be found to show repentance every day.'"<sup>2</sup> It was already during the lifetime of our Lord that the High Priest made the following confession, repeated thrice, during the service on the Day of Atonement: "O the Name [*i.e.* the Almighty], I have done iniquity, I have transgressed, I have sinned before thee, I and my house. I beseech, O Name, pardon the iniquities, the transgressions, and the sins which I have iniquitously done, sinned, and transgressed against Thee, I and my house; as it is written in the Law of Thy servant Moses, saying, For on

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Lk. vii. 33; in neither passage are the religious leaders specifically mentioned, but it can hardly be doubted that they were included among "those of this generation" (Matth. xi. 16; Lk. vii. 31).

<sup>2</sup> Bab. Talmud, *Shabbath* 153 a, quoted by Fiebig, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 f., see also pp. 30 ff.

this day shall atonement be made for you to cleanse you from all your sins before the Lord, ye shall be clean (Lev. xvi. 30). And they answered after him: Blessed be the Name of His Glorious Kingdom for ever and ever.”<sup>1</sup> Many further illustrations could be given to show how, both by individual admonition and in public worship, men were called upon to show repentance by confession and forsaking of sin. This must be realized in order to understand fully what the ignoring of the Baptist’s preaching on repentance meant, and how utterly insincere it was for the religious leaders to say that they did not know whether his baptism was from heaven or not.

When, as a result of this, our Lord says: “Neither tell I you by what authority I do these things,” we may perhaps see an emphasis on the first “I” (all three evangelists have the pronoun, and none of them have it for the second “I”), as though He meant to say, “I will not tell you, but let the following parables do so”; for, as a matter of fact, the parables which He now utters do show quite clearly by whose authority He spoke and acted.

The parable of the Two Sons must clearly be read in connexion with the comments which follow it. In its general sense the meaning of the parable is clear; there is intended to be a correspondence between the two sons, viz. the publicans and harlots, and the religious leaders, respectively. The first son says he will not go and work in the vineyard, but afterwards repents, and goes. This must correspond with the publicans and harlots who, living in sin, at first refused to do what was right, but afterwards, at the preaching of the Baptist, repented. The second son must, therefore, correspond with the religious leaders; by their ostensible practice of religion they appeared willing to “work in the vineyard”; but their insincerity, and want of a true religious spirit, showed that in reality they were unwilling to do so; they had come to the preaching of the Baptist, but afterwards ignored him. So far everything is quite straightforward. It is when we come to verse 32

<sup>1</sup> See Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, Second Series, pp. 24 ff. (1924).



that a difficulty arises: "For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not; but the publicans and harlots believed him; and ye, when ye saw it, did not even repent yourselves afterward, that ye might believe him" (cp. Lk. vii. 30). This would make the religious leaders correspond with neither of the sons of the parable; for, according to this verse, they neither say that they will "work in the vineyard," nor do they do so. Yet, according to Matth. iii. 7, where it is said that many of the Pharisees and Sadducees came to John's baptism, the religious leaders would correspond to the second son, as we have seen, who said he would go, but went not. There is also the difficulty that while in the parable it is a question of the relations of the sons towards their father (representing God), this verse deals with the two attitudes towards the Baptist. The section certainly reads more smoothly without verse 32, and McNeile is probably right in saying that "the verse seems to be composed of elements drawn partly from the parable and verse 31, and partly from verses 25, 26, the latter leading to the mention of John and to 'that ye might believe him.'"<sup>1</sup>

But, however this may be, the teaching of the parable is clear: just as the son who at first refuses to do his father's will, but afterwards obeys him, is a better son than he who promises to do his father's will, but does not do it,—so are they truer children of their heavenly Father who, though at first withholding obedience to Him, ultimately repent and serve Him, than those who make a show of religion, but in reality are far from Him. And a living illustration of this was that the ungodly publicans and harlots repented at the preaching of John, while the self-righteous and outwardly pious religious leaders turned their backs on him, and did not repent of their hypocrisy.

There is a Rabbinical parable in which a lesson somewhat similar to that of our parable is taught; this is worth quoting because, in spite of its similarity, it illustrates the striking contrast in other respects often found between Rabbinical parables and those of the Gospels; it runs:

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 307.



"It is like a king who had a plot of land which he wished labourers to cultivate. He called the first and said, 'Wilt thou undertake (to cultivate) the field?' He replied, 'I have not the strength to do so, it is too hard for me.' In the same way he asked a second, a third, and a fourth; but none of them would undertake it. Thereupon he called the fifth, and said to him, 'Wilt thou undertake (to cultivate) the field?' He replied, 'Yes'; he (the king) said, 'On the condition that thou wilt keep it in order?' He replied, 'Yes.' But when he came to the field, he let it lie fallow. Upon whom will the wrath of the king be vented, on those who said, 'We cannot undertake it,' or against him who undertook it, but who having undertaken it, and having come (to the field), let it lie fallow? Will it not be upon him who undertook it? . . ."<sup>1</sup> With the application of this parable we are not concerned; it is quite different from the one under consideration; but, as will have been seen, the similarity as well as the contrast between the two is of interest.

Following the Parable of the Two Sons, there comes immediately:

#### THE PARABLE OF THE WICKED HUSBANDMEN

[Matth. xxi. 33-46; Mk. xii. 1-12; Lk. xx. 9-19]

The parable of the Two Sons constitutes, as it were, the preliminary part of what is, in effect, our Lord's answer to the question, "By what authority doest thou these things? and who gave thee this authority?" The first step was to show that the baptism of John was from heaven; he was therefore a true prophet, and the forerunner of the Messiah, as he claimed to be. Without a break, according to the Matthæan record, our Lord continues: "Hear another parable." Mk. xii. 1 has: "And he began to speak unto them in parables"; Lk. xx. 9: "And he began to speak unto the people this parable." But the first Gospel has, it would seem, the better text because these three parables

<sup>1</sup> *Shemoth Rabba* 88 a, quoted by Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 865.

belong together, and are the outcome, as we have seen, of what the religious leaders had asked our Lord.

The parable opens with some details about the construction of a vineyard; the setting of a hedge, digging the wine-press, and building a tower; these are taken from Isa. v. 1, 2; they are given in Matthew and Mark, but not in Luke, and probably were not an original part of the parable; in the Isaiah passage the vineyard is "the house of Israel" (v. 7), it does not, therefore, correspond with what is meant by the vineyard in the parable (see below).

The parable tells of how the owner of the vineyard let it out to husbandmen, and then went into another country (Luke adds "for a long time"); this is, perhaps, intended to emphasize the responsibility of the husbandmen, and that they were trusted; but, in any case, the absence of the owner is required because of what is said later in the parable about the sending of his servants to receive the fruits of the vineyard. On three occasions servants are sent, being ill-treated or killed each time; finally, the owner sends his son, thinking that the husbandmen will reverence him; but they, seeing in him the heir to the vineyard, kill him, thinking that as there is no heir, they can take possession of it. Thereupon the owner of the vineyard returns, and destroys the wicked husbandmen; the vineyard he gives to others who will "render him the fruits in their seasons."

The three forms of this parable which we have in the Gospels show small variations, and there are a number of verbal differences in the Greek; the careful preparation of the vineyard is omitted in Luke; in Matthew, on each occasion of servants being sent there are several, but in Mark and Luke it is one only each time;<sup>1</sup> the treatment of the servants differs slightly in the three accounts, and there are other slight variations. Much is made of these small details by some commentators; but they are unimportant points due, in all probability, to the evangelists, or to their

<sup>1</sup> In Mk. xii. 5, where the third servant is spoken of, it is said: "And he sent another; and him they killed; and many others, beating some and killing some"; this reads as though more servants were sent after the third; Lk. xx. 12, on the other hand, reads more simply: "And he sent yet a third; and him also they wounded, and cast him forth."

sources, and do not affect the teaching or meaning of the parable; we need not trouble about them. But one variation is of importance, and demands further consideration. In Matth. xxi. 40, 41 we read: "When therefore the lord of the vineyard shall come, what will he do unto those husbandmen? They say unto him, He will miserably destroy those miserable men, and will let out the vineyard unto other husbandmen, which shall render him the fruits in their seasons. Jesus saith unto them . . ." By "they say unto him" must be meant the religious rulers, for it is to them that our Lord is speaking; this, therefore, makes the rulers utter their own condemnation, for, as it says later, "when the chief priests and Pharisees heard his parables, they perceived that he spake of them" (Matth. xxi. 45). That these rulers should pronounce their own doom is highly improbable; both Mark and Luke, on the other hand, make these words part of the parable as uttered by our Lord: "What, therefore, will the lord of the vineyard do? he will come and destroy the husbandmen, and will give the vineyard unto others" (Mk. xii. 9; Lk. xx. 16). It can hardly be doubted that the first Gospel reflects later thought here. The same must be said of Matth. xxi. 43, where, after the quotation from Ps. cxviii. 22, 23, our Lord is made to say: "Therefore say I unto you, the Kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof"; these words are omitted in Mark and Luke, and presuppose the breach between the Jewish and the Christian churches of later days. It should also be noted how this verse breaks the connexion between the quotation from Ps. cxviii. 22, 23 and our Lord's comment on it.

There is no difficulty in recognizing who are represented by the characters in the parable. The lord of the vineyard clearly represents God. The husbandmen represent the Jewish religious leaders, the purpose of the parable shows that (see also Matth. xxi. 45; Mk. xii. 12; Lk. xx. 19). The servants of the lord of the vineyard can represent none but the prophets. The son represents our Lord. It has been pointed out that Mk. xii. 6-8 (= Matth. xxi. 37-39,

Lk. xx. 13-15), which speaks of the sending of the son and his death, sounds very much like a *vaticinium ex eventu*; but, in view of the frequent occasions on which our Lord foretold His death, there should be no difficulty here.

More problematical is the question as to what is represented by the vineyard; in the prototype of the parable the vineyard is "the house of Israel" (Isa. v. 7); with this agrees what is said in Matth. xxi. 43, where "another nation" is spoken of; but in this same passage it is said that "the Kingdom of God" shall be taken away from you," from which it would appear that the vineyard represented the Kingdom. From this, therefore, it is clear that the vineyard cannot represent the nation of Israel. The inconsistency contained in the verse bears out what has been said, viz. that it does not form part of the original parable. At the same time, the interpretation of the vineyard as representing the Kingdom of Heaven must be right; and although neither Mark or Luke give this interpretation in so many words, they can mean nothing else when they say that the vineyard will be given to others (Mk. xii. 8; Lk. xx. 16), and especially when they speak of the son as the "heir" (Mk. xii. 7; Lk. xx. 14; so also Matth. xxi. 38); and, above all, when God is represented as the owner of the vineyard; for although this is nowhere directly stated, it is too obvious to need proof.

The vineyard, then, represents the Kingdom; but it represents the Kingdom in its early beginnings, not yet in its fullness; that could take place only when the life and work of Christ inaugurated a new era. As our Lord taught elsewhere, too, the Kingdom is not only of the future; just as the vineyard, now in the hands of the husbandmen, had been long previously in existence, so, as the history of Israel witnesses, had the Kingdom long been established on earth, though for the present, necessarily undeveloped, and it had been in possession of those who had proved themselves unworthy. Again, just as the vineyard, as long as it was in the hands of the wicked husbandmen, could not yield its fruits, so the Kingdom, as long as it was usurped by those who took it by violence (cp. p. 70 above), who



had repudiated the forerunner, and who sought to kill the Messiah, could not bring forth its fruits,—righteousness, truth, justice, mercy. That necessitated that the vineyard should be given to others, but not to any particular nation; the Kingdom would embrace all, Jews and Gentiles, bond and free, whosoever would work as faithful labourers and help to bring forth the fruits appertaining to it.

The quotation from Ps. cxviii. 22, 23, which comes at the close of the parable, and which, according to all three evangelists, is uttered by our Lord, demands some notice. It is to be noted, first, that Luke gives only part of the passage: "The stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner"; Matthew and Mark add: "This was from the Lord, and it is marvellous in our eyes." It cannot be denied that the simile of the building comes inappropriately after a parable in which an agricultural picture is presented; the quotation has no real point of contact with the parable; and it must also be allowed that in all three accounts the quotation is disturbing, for the text reads more logically and more pointedly without it. According to the quotation, the son (= the rejected stone), who had been cruelly put to death, is to be restored in glorious wise; a divine wonder ("it is marvellous in our eyes") is to transform the rejected one into the most exalted figure in the Kingdom. This is all out of touch with the content and purpose of the parable. There is much, therefore, to be said for the contention that this quotation was inserted later by a Christian believer who understood Matth. xxi. 39 in the sense of a prophecy of the crucifixion of the Son of God by the Jewish religious authorities; he felt that the doom pronounced against the murderers in verse 41 did not go far enough, and desired to have the outcome of their crime more fully and positively set forth by showing that the humiliation and death of the Messiah heralded His exaltation.<sup>1</sup>

The quotation is, thus, unnecessary for the teaching of the parable. Like the parable of the Two Sons, this parable is also concerned with the answer to the question: "By

<sup>1</sup> Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, Zweiter Teil, p. 405 (1910).

whose authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" The former showed that John the Baptist was a true prophet and the forerunner of the Messiah; his baptism, therefore, was from heaven. In this second parable our Lord, indirectly, but none the less certainly, taught that He was the Messiah; this must be the meaning underlying Matth. xxi. 39 ("And they took him, and cast him forth out<sup>1</sup> of the vineyard, and killed him"), and that, therefore, what He said and did was by divine authority; this is further borne out by the historical retrospect and the indication of what was to come, contained in the parable, or, to be more exact, the allegory; thus: God gave to the religious leaders of Israel, as representing the nation, the Law, the covenant, and many other privileges, such as had not been granted to any other nation; in return He demanded the "fruits"<sup>2</sup> of His goodness, and sent the prophets to gather them; but the prophets were maltreated; ultimately God sent His Son, who was crucified. This made it impossible for the divine mercy to be further extended to the ungrateful recipients of His love; those who had consistently rebelled against Him could no longer remain the "chosen people." Their inheritance, as it might have been,—the "vineyard,"—was therefore taken from them, and given to the Christian Church.

This parable, too, concerned the Kingdom of Heaven, but was plainly understood by those to whom it was spoken (Matth. xxi. 45, 46; Mk. xii. 12; Lk. xx. 19).

#### THE PARABLE OF THE WEDDING FEAST

[Matth. xxii. 1-14; cp. Lk. xiv. 16-24]

In studying this parable it is impossible to blind oneself to the fact that some considerable difficulties present themselves. We shall begin by facing them.

The parable tells of how a king made a marriage feast

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Hebr. xiii. 12: "Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people through his own blood, suffered without the gate."

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Mic. vi. 8: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

for his son, and sent out his servants to bid the invited guests come; they, however, refuse to come, though they give no reason for their refusal. Thereupon the king sends out other servants with a similar invitation; but again they refuse to come, though this time reasons are given for their refusal. So far there is no difficulty; the outrageous behaviour in refusing the royal invitation is a trait necessary for the purpose of the teaching of the parable. It is when we come to verse 6 that the first difficulty arises: "And the rest [*i.e.* of those invited] laid hold on his servants, and entreated them shamefully, and killed them." The refusal of the invitation, however ungracious, one can understand; but to kill the servants for merely conveying their lord's invitation is incomprehensible; it is not like the servants in the preceding parable who had come to take the fruits of the vineyard; in that case the husbandmen were to be deprived of something, and therefore killed the servants; here nothing is to be taken from those invited: they merely refuse what is offered. A further difficulty occurs in verse 7: "But the king was wroth; and he sent his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned their city." This is clearly quite out of harmony with an invitation to a marriage feast; how can armies be required to punish the refusal to attend the feast? And those invited would obviously be living in the city in which the marriage feast was held; how, then, can it be said that their city was burned? The parable then continues: "Then saith he to his servants, the wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy," whereupon the servants are told to seek other guests. But how can the wedding still be ready after the armies had been sent out and had destroyed those first invited, and burned their city? Another difficulty occurs in verses 11-13; the new guests have been brought in from the highways, so that there could be no question of their coming to the marriage feast suitably dressed, yet, with one exception, all the guests have on wedding garments; the solitary one who has not on a wedding garment is bound hand and foot, and cast out into outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of



teeth. The punishment seems out of proportion to the offence.

Before an attempt is made to explain these difficulties, there is another problem which demands notice, and that is the relation between this parable and that contained in Lk. xiv. 16-24. Striking similarities exist between the two; in each, the scene presented is a feast; servants are sent out on different occasions to bid the guests come; those who are bidden refuse to come; reasons for the refusal are given (in Luke rather more specifically than in Matthew); the wrath of him who had prepared the feast; the servants are sent out again to gather all and sundry to the feast. On the other hand, there are some notable differences between the two: in Matthew it is a king who makes a marriage feast for his son, while in Luke it is merely a certain man who makes a "great supper"; <sup>1</sup> in Matthew the servants who are last to be sent are either maltreated or killed; there is no mention of this in Luke, nor yet of armies being sent and the city of the murderers being destroyed; the whole of Matth. xxii. 11-14 has nothing corresponding to it in Luke. It is clear, then, that the similarities, like the differences, between the two are noteworthy. That the opinions of scholars regarding the relation between them should differ is natural enough when there is so much to be said in favour of each theory held. These theories may, in general terms, be thus described: The two evangelists present two quite independent parables; <sup>2</sup> it is pointed out with much truth that the occasion of the utterance of each is very different; in the case of Matthew it is quite evident that the parable is intended to be the last of the series of three parables—this has already been pointed out—which were primarily addressed to the religious rulers in reply to the question about John's baptism and as to the authority by which our Lord spoke and acted; in this case the parable was spoken in the Temple in presence of the multitudes, but especially in the hearing of, and against, the chief priests and Pharisees. Quite different is

<sup>1</sup> Matth. ἐποίησεν γάμους (= nuptiae), Lk. ἐποίησεν δεῖπνον μέγα.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 322.



the occasion on which the parable in Luke was uttered; it was during a meal on the Sabbath in the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees. After some very pointed remarks on the part of our Lord, one of those who were sitting at meat said: "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God" (Lk. xiv. 15). It is immediately upon this our Lord utters the parable of which we are thinking. This great difference of occasion cannot be left out of consideration in discussing the relation between the passages with which we are concerned; it suggests that they are entirely independent of each other. Another matter, not without significance in this connexion, is the difference of our Lord's relationship with the Pharisees postulated in the two parables, respectively. It is clear from the occasion on which the Lucan parable was uttered that our Lord was on friendly terms with a Pharisee, while the Matthæan parable shows a strongly antagonistic attitude towards them. Too much must not, however, be made of this point, because, as has been shown above,<sup>1</sup> there were very different types of Pharisees, and our Lord may well have been on friendly terms with individual Pharisees, though strongly opposed to those who sought to undermine His teaching.

Another theory is that the parable in Matth. xxii represents only a different recension of that occurring in Lk. xiv; the two were originally one and the same parable,<sup>2</sup> but elements from other sources were added in the Matthæan form for the purpose of bringing it into harmony with the two preceding parables. McNeile writes: "If, as is probable, the two parables are a doublet [he is only referring to verses 1-10 in the Matthæan form] from one original, Matthew has placed his in the more appropriate position, the teaching being similar to that in xxi. 31 and 41, but Luke has preserved the more original form."<sup>3</sup>

A third theory is that while the two parables are inde-

<sup>1</sup> P. 43.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Jülicher, *op. cit.*, ii. 407, and it seems to be implied by Buzy, *Introduction aux Paraboles Évangéliques*, p. 404 (1912); similarly Dodd: "that they [*i.e.*, the evangelists] are following variant traditions of the identical story is clear" (*op. cit.*, p. 121).

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 314.

pendent of each other, both represent the utilization of the same theme appropriate to different purposes.<sup>1</sup> This seems to us to be extremely likely. We find again and again in Rabbinical literature the same theme utilized by one or more Rabbis for the purpose of teaching different truths in the form of parables. An interesting illustration of this, moreover, occurs in Lk. xiv. 7-11 and the parable we are considering (in its Lucan form, Lk. xiv. 16-24); here we have the theme of the giving of a feast; in the one case the theme is used to teach the lesson of humility, in the other to show the penalty of refusing to come to the feast when bidden; in this latter there is, of course, a deeper meaning; but the theme of giving a feast is the basis of each. The use of a familiar theme would be the means of arresting the attention of listeners.

We return now to the difficulties mentioned above. The first of these dealt with Matth. xxii. 6, which tells of the servants being killed by those to whom they were sent to give their master's invitation; this is so entirely out of harmony with the rest of the parable that it cannot have belonged to it in its original form. It seems likely that a later editor of Matthew, seeing that these three parables belonged together, wished to bring this last one into further connexion with the second, and echoed xxi. 35, 36, where it is told of how the wicked husbandmen killed the servants who were sent to receive the fruits of the vineyard. Then, as to verse 7, which speaks of the sending of armies and of the burning of the city, this can only refer to the sending of the Roman armies and the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70; from this it is seen that these two verses must have been added after this date, and therefore that the servants spoken of in verse 6 will refer to the persecution of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The elimination of verses 6, 7 makes the text read smoothly and logically.

The next difficulty arises in verses 11-13; these deal with the punishment of the guest who did not have on a wedding garment, while all the rest are suitably clad; we naturally ask how wedding garments could have been procured by

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Fiebig, *op. cit.*, p. 26

those who were brought in from the highways, *i.e.* the poor and the outcast; and why the man without a wedding garment should be so severely punished. This difficulty is to be explained in this way: Verses 1-10 (with the deletion of verses 6, 7) is a separate parable of which the concluding portion has been displaced in favour of verses 11-13; these latter are part of an eschatological parable from which the opening part had necessarily to be omitted; it was put in its present place by the same editor who inserted verses 6, 7. The parable from which verses 11-13 was taken was clearly also one which had as its theme a wedding feast, and which therefore seemed an appropriate addition to a parable with a similar theme. Thus, verses 1-10 (without verses 6, 7) is a parable without its conclusion, while verses 11-13 is a parable without its beginning. This suggested solution may or may not be acceptable, but it may be claimed that it accounts for the difficulties presented. The purpose which the editor had in view was to show the final end of those who had rejected Christ. The Jewish religious leaders had refused to recognize John the Baptist as the forerunner of the Messiah; they had refused to recognize Christ as the Messiah; they had refused the invitation to the marriage feast, *i.e.* they would have nothing to do with that development of the Kingdom of Heaven which Christ came to inaugurate. Therefore judgement is pronounced against them; the man without the wedding garment, in the present context,<sup>1</sup> represents the body of the Jewish religious leaders who are condemned to eternal punishment.

In support of what has been said, it may be added that, however much our Lord felt the antagonism manifested against Him by the religious leaders, He never manifested personal bitterness towards them; against their hypocrisy, self-righteousness, and tyranny He spoke in strong terms; but to apply to them such words as those of Matth. xxi. 44, xxii. 13, Lk. xx. 18, was not His way; they echo the feelings of bitter enmity against the Jewish Church of later days. The publicans and harlots might precede the religious

<sup>1</sup> There can be little doubt that the parable of which verses 11-13 are taken had an entirely different object and meaning as originally uttered.



leaders into the Kingdom of God (Matth. xxi. 31); but the very words show that, in spite of all, they, too, might enter in. Whatever our Lord suffered by word or deed from chief priests, scribes or Pharisees, His last words about them were: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

It was pointed out above that in Rabbinical literature the same parabolic theme is used by one or more Rabbis for the purpose of teaching different truths, and that the same may well have been the case with our Lord with regard to the two parables which we have been considering. There are parallels to these in some of the Rabbinical writings which are so interesting that one or two illustrations may be given; and the possibility may be entertained of ancient parabolic themes having in some cases been utilized by our Lord and adapted to His own teaching just as the Rabbis had done for the purposes of their teaching.

Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai (second half of the first century A.D.) uttered this parable: "It is like a king who invited his servants to a feast, but he did not fix any time [for the beginning of the feast]. The wise ones among them arrayed themselves and sat at the entrance of the king's palace. They said: 'Something is still wanting in the king's palace [*i.e.* we shall not have long to wait]. But the foolish ones among them went on with their ordinary work, saying, 'Is there ever a feast without long waiting?' Suddenly the king called for his servants. The wise ones among them entered in, fitly arrayed as they were. But the foolish ones entered into his presence all dirty as they were. Then did the king rejoice over the wise ones, but he was wrath with the foolish ones; and he said, 'These who arrayed themselves for the feast, let them recline, and eat and drink; but these who did not array themselves for the feast, let them remain standing and watch [the others].'"<sup>1</sup>

The following is a parallel to this, showing how the same theme was used for a different purpose; it is ascribed to Rabbi Judah the Prince (ha-Nasi), who lived about A.D. 200

<sup>1</sup> Bab. Talmud, *Shabbath*, 153 a, quoted by Fiebig, *op. cit.*, pp. 17 f.



“It is like a king who made a feast, and invited guests to come. He said to them, ‘Go, wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, anoint yourselves, wash your garments, and prepare yourselves for the feast.’ But he did not fix any hour at which the feast should begin. And the wise ones strolled about at the gate of the king’s palace. They said, ‘Is there yet something required in the king’s palace?’ [*i.e.* some detail is still required for the furnishing of the feast]. But the foolish ones among them did not take heed of what the king had said; they said, ‘After all, we shall see when the royal feast starts; is there ever a feast without long waiting?’ And they began conversing with one another. Then the whitewasher went to his lime, and the potter to his clay, and the smith to his soot (?), and the cleaner to his wash-house. Suddenly the king said: ‘Let all enter into the feast.’ Then they all hastened in; these entered in all fitly arrayed, and these entered in in their unfit state. Then did the king rejoice over the wise ones that they had paid due heed to the word of the king, and that they had honoured the palace of the king [*i.e.* by their presence]. But he was wrath with the foolish ones because they had not paid due heed to the word of the king, and had dishonoured the palace of the king. Then said the king: ‘These who arrayed themselves fittingly for the feast, let them enter in and partake of the royal feast; but these who did not array themselves fittingly for the feast, will not be permitted to partake of the royal feast,—perhaps they had better go away altogether; but stay,—let rather these (who are fitly arrayed) recline at the table and eat and drink; but let these (who are not fitly arrayed) stand upon their feet, let them suffer punishment by merely looking on and being angered.’ ”<sup>1</sup>

In the case of the other form of the parable it was given as a comment on Eccles. ix. 8 (“Let thy garments be always white; and let not thy head lack ointment”); but Judah ha-Nasi utilized it for a very different purpose, for he adds at the end of it: “So (shall it be) in the world to

<sup>1</sup> Midrash *Kohleleth Rabba* on ix. 8; cp. Fiebig, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 ff.; Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 878 f. The translation of the last few sentences given above is somewhat free in order to make the meaning clearer.

come; this is that which Isaiah says, 'Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry' (Isa. lxv. 13)." This point is of particular interest in view of what is said at the end of the parable in Matth. xxii. 13: "Bind him hand and foot, and cast him into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth."

## LECTURE VIII

### THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS

[Matth. xxv. 1-13]

### THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

[Matth. xxv. 14-30; cp. Lk. xix. 12-27]

### AND THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS

[Matth. xxv. 31-46]

WE come now to three parables which deal with the Kingdom of Heaven from the point of view of its near approach; they are, however, more concerned with those who would be members of the Kingdom than with the subject of the Kingdom itself. They form the illustrative sequel to the eschatological teaching of the preceding chapter (xxiv).<sup>1</sup> It will, therefore, be necessary to take a brief glance at what is said in that chapter.

The first note is struck when, the disciples having drawn our Lord's attention to the buildings of the Temple, He says: "Verily, I say unto you, there shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down" (xxiv. 2; cp. Mk. xiii. 2; Lk. xxi. 6); thereupon the disciples ask: "When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [or, presence]?" That leads to the apocalyptic discourse which may be summarized thus: A warning against false Messiahs, whose advent will cause wars; wars among the nations are also predicted; and there will be famines and earthquakes. These are the beginnings of terrors (lit. pangs) which will herald the end (Matth. xxiv. 4-8; cp. Mk. xiii. 5-8; Lk. xxi. 8-11). In Rabbinical literature these signs of the end are known as "the birthpangs of the Messiah"; the details

<sup>1</sup> We do not discuss here the question of the sources of the sayings of which this chapter is made up, as this would take us too far afield; we are considering it only as a prelude to the parables which follow.

given are in many respects identical with what is said in this chapter.<sup>1</sup> There follow then warnings of the persecutions which will arise (Matth. xxiv. 9-14; Mk. xiii. 9-13; Lk. xxi. 12-19);<sup>2</sup> further details of the terrors of that time are then uttered, followed by another warning about false Christs and false prophets (Matth. xxiv. 15-25; Mk. xiii. 14-23; Lk. xxi. 20-24). The suddenness of the coming of the Son of Man is then foretold, and the cryptic words are added: "Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together" (Matth. xxiv. 26-28, cp. Lk. xvii. 23, 24, 37).<sup>3</sup> Terrors in the natural world will then occur, followed by the advent of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven (Matth. xxiv. 29-31; Mk. xiii. 24-27; Lk. xxi. 25-28). The parable of the Fig-tree tells of how by the signs described men may know when the end of all things is about to take place (Matth. xxiv. 32-36; Mk. xiii. 28-32; Lk. xxi. 29-33). A final warning is given by pointing to the suddenness and unexpectedness of the flood; similarly will the end come, when least expected (Matth. xxiv. 37-41; cp. Lk. xvii. 26, 27, 34, 35). The warning to watch is therefore emphasized by the parable of the master of the house who did not watch, and whose house was in consequence broken into by the thief (Matth. xxiv. 42-44, cp. Lk. xii. 39, 40); and this is further illustrated by the picture of the contrast between the faithful servant who watched for his master's return in fulfilling his duty, and

<sup>1</sup> Mishna, *Sota*, ix. 15; Midrash *Beresith Rabba*, ch. xlii; Bab. Talm., *Sanhedrin* 97 a; cp. also the *Ezra Apocalypse* (2 [4] Esdras) xvi. 12, xv. 34 ff. A good many details will be found in the present writer's, *The Doctrine of the Last Things* (1911).

<sup>2</sup> In Matth. xxiv. 9, after the words, "then shall they deliver you up unto tribulation," there should probably be added Matth. x. 17-21.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Enoch xc. Fiebig's tentative explanation of these last words is that the carcass represents the present world, or else Jerusalem, which is destined to perish, and the eagles represent the Roman armies or other hostile powers; i.e., the words announce that the judgement is near at hand (*op. cit.*, p. 156). For the title "Son of Man" see Enoch xlvi. 1 ff. Dodd, on the other hand, says: "the idea surely is that there are certain conjunctions of phenomena which are quite constant and inevitable, so that if the one is observed, the other may be inferred; but what phenomena are in view we cannot say"; this strikes us as the far more likely meaning of the words. He says, further: "It has been suggested that the *ἀετοί* are Roman eagles and that this is a forecast of the war. But though eagles will eat carrion, the vulture is the bird which characteristically watches for the slain. *Ἀερός* is here probably the vulture, as in some places in the Septuagint" (*op. cit.*, p. 88).



the evil servant who gave himself up to wicked courses, and was not prepared for his master's sudden appearance (Matth. xxiv. 45-51; Lk. xii. 42-46). There is a Jewish parable which tells of how a wicked servant gave himself up to drunkenness during his master's absence; he was punished by being beheaded (cp. διχοτομήσει αὐτόν).<sup>1</sup>

Matth. xxiv thus constitutes a discourse on the last things; and the identity between much that it contains and various passages in both apocalyptic writings and in Rabbinical literature, has naturally led to the question as to how much of the contents of this chapter can be regarded as genuine utterances of our Lord. Difficult and controversial, too, is the further question as to the degree in which our Lord shared the doctrines and conceptions of contemporary Jewish apocalyptic thought. In discussing this chapter, McNeile says: "Some predictions of Jesus concerning the nearness of the End probably formed the basis upon which a Jewish-Christian writer compiled a series of sayings, many of them couched in the conventional language of Jewish eschatology."<sup>2</sup> But the crucial point is: What was the nature and content of His predictions concerning the End? We do not propose to enter upon a discussion of this very controversial subject, and will merely content ourselves with expressing our belief that a good deal of apocalyptic material has been imputed to our Lord in the Synoptic Gospels which He never uttered; the possibility must also be contemplated of some things which He said concerning the End not having been understood in the sense in which He meant them.

We come now to consider the parable of the Ten Virgins:—

"Then shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were foolish, and five were wise." The picture presented is that of a Jewish wedding in the time of our Lord; therefore to realize the

<sup>1</sup> Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 968; they also give other parallels, more or less appropriate, to various passages in Matth. xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 343.

significance of the various points in the parable our first task must be to consider Jewish custom in regard to a wedding in those days. There was nothing corresponding to a religious wedding ceremony such as takes place in the modern synagogue. In those days there were three stages in the matrimonial procedure: first the engagement; this was either a formal arrangement entered into by the respective fathers of the man and the woman, with or without the knowledge of the two latter, or it was a genuine love match; but in this case, too, the negotiations were carried out by the respective fathers. That constituted the first step. Then followed the betrothal; here there were two central factors: first, a mutual promise made before witnesses, which took place in the house of the woman's parents; and then the money transactions; these consisted of the settlement of the payment which the man undertook to give to the woman's father, and also of a present to his betrothed; this constituted the ratification of the betrothal. It was also usual for the woman's parents to give a present to their future son-in-law. The man and the woman were bound to one another by the betrothal ceremony, though they were not yet actually man and wife;<sup>1</sup> in fact, so binding was the betrothal that if the man died during the period that it lasted the woman was regarded as a widow;<sup>2</sup> the cancelling of a betrothal was not permitted; if, however, such a thing took place, it was parallel to divorce, and the man had to give the woman a *gēṭ*, equivalent to a writ of divorcement, and pay her a fine by way of compensation.<sup>3</sup> In our Lord's time the betrothal period lasted a year, but in earlier times a man and a woman were regarded as husband and wife after the betrothal ceremony. This, then, was the second step. Finally, there was the ceremony which took place at the conclusion of the betrothal year; and this is the stage presupposed in our parable. As soon as the year had run out a day was fixed on which the

<sup>1</sup> The betrothal, or marriage, ring did not come into use until the seventh or eighth century A.D.

<sup>2</sup> Mishna, *Kethubim*, i. 2.

<sup>3</sup> The laws about writs of divorcement are contained in the Mishna tractate *Gittin*.

bridegroom, accompanied by his friends, went to fetch the bride from her father's house to the marriage feast, held either in his father's house, or in his own, as the case might be. The marriage feast was always held in the evening. The bride with her bridesmaids awaited the bridegroom as soon as it began to get dark. Then took place the bridal procession, *i.e.* the formal bringing home of the bride. As soon as the bridegroom left his house to fetch the bride home the final preparations were made in his house for the marriage feast. When all was ready, the dependants of the bridegroom waited in his house for the approach of the bridal procession, for as soon as this drew near the dependants of the bridegroom had to come forth to meet the bride and bridegroom. Since, as just pointed out, this all took place in the evening, lamps were carried both in the bridal procession and also by those who went out to meet it from the bridegroom's house; these lamps were small, and therefore required frequent re-filling with oil, for which reason oil-vessels had to be carried.<sup>1</sup> Having met the bridal procession, they joined it, and all entered the bridegroom's house for the marriage feast; thereupon the entrance was closed, and nobody who had not taken part in the bridal procession was permitted to enter. That, put quite briefly, was the normal procedure in Jewish weddings in our Lord's time among well-to-do people; it is the last step in this procedure which forms the background of our parable.

The opening word of the parable (in the Greek as in the English text), "*Then* shall the Kingdom of Heaven be likened unto . . .," is intended to link it immediately on to all that has been said in the preceding chapter; and the parable presents, in the form of a story, the fate of those who are, respectively, unworthy and worthy to become members of the Kingdom; it is in this sense that the open-

<sup>1</sup> The lamps are likely to have been similar to those described by Rashi in later times (eleventh century A.D.); in speaking of the bridal procession he says that, preceding the bride, there were carried about ten poles, on the top of each of which a copper vessel was fixed; in these, rags were placed soaked in oil; they were then lit and borne before the bride (Strack-Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, i. 969).



ing words are to be understood. The Kingdom is for those who, by being faithful to their charge, and thereby always ready for its advent, are fit to enter into its joys.

One would expect, at first sight, that in a parable like this the central figures would be the same as in the episode from real life upon which it is based; such, however, is not the case. The central figures at a marriage are the bride and bridegroom; in this parable the bride is never even mentioned.<sup>1</sup> The five foolish virgins are the central figures; it is upon them and their doings that the main emphasis is laid; that indicates the main purpose of the parable. The ten virgins were there to welcome the bride and the bridegroom; to be prepared and ready to receive them at the right moment was the one purpose and duty of the virgins' presence at the marriage festivities. In the final issue five of them were not prepared and were not in their places when the critical moment arrived at which they had to go out to meet the bride and bridegroom; as a result they were excluded from the marriage feast.

Now, for practical purposes the real value of a parable consists in its interpretation and application; both interpretation and application may, or often do, differ among commentators; but it will always be found that a parable contains one or more underlying principles, however it may be explained or allegorized. Even when a parable does not seem applicable to the changing conditions of human life, these principles hold good. This parable is eschatological, *i.e.* it is a symbolic picture of how things will be at the "Second Coming," which is the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven. The five foolish virgins represent a type of individual unworthy, through his own fault, of inheriting the Kingdom of Heaven. For the present, let us concen-

<sup>1</sup> There is, however, a good deal of evidence in favour of the reading: "... and went forth to meet the bridegroom *and the bride.*" It is quite possible that the addition belonged to the parable in its original form. "The idea widely entertained by early Christians was that the Bridegroom, Christ, would come at the last day to fetch His Bride, the Church. 'And the bride,' being incompatible with this, was omitted. But this allegorical conception is absent from the parable, which teaches only the necessity of readiness for the Messiah's arrival, which will be soon and sudden. The virgins, therefore, are to be ready for the bridegroom and bride, *i.e.*, for the marriage procession" (McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 361).



trate upon that point in the teaching of the parable. The five foolish virgins are excluded from the marriage feast, which represents the Kingdom. Exclusion from the Kingdom must be the result, we should imagine, of grievous wickedness; but at first sight, at all events, it does not appear that the five foolish virgins were guilty of anything so very bad. They had, in company with the other virgins, come to welcome the bride and bridegroom, *i.e.* their intentions were of the best; they had merely forgotten to take sufficient oil, in consequence of which they were a little late for the feast. In other words, they were lacking in foresight, they were thoughtless, and therefore not fully prepared at the supreme moment; but no act of wickedness, no purposeful wrong-doing is laid to their charge. Now, it is doubtless true that the one object of this parable was to warn men against being unprepared for the coming of the Kingdom; for the advent of the Kingdom was imminent, any moment might see its approach; it would, in any case, be within the lifetime of those who listened. Thus, the parable had a meaning only for those to whom it was first uttered. It can, therefore, be urged that any interpretation or application of the parable other than that originally intended is beside the mark, a reading into the text what is not there. To this, however, it must be replied that whatever immediate and specific purpose our Lord's parables had, they always contain implications, and must be read in the light of His teaching in general. It is obviously impossible to deal with more than a limited number of subjects, sometimes only one, in a parable; but that does not mean to say that other vital truths and precepts are ignored; they are assumed, taken for granted, or implied. In the particular case before us the central purpose is clear; but in the behaviour of the five foolish virgins something must be implied which does not appear upon the surface, otherwise exclusion from the marriage feast, *i.e.* the Kingdom, on account of a mere act of thoughtlessness, and where there was no deliberate intention to do wrong, seems too harsh. When we seek, then, for the implication, basing it upon the general teaching of our Lord, it is to be found

in the fact that thoughtlessness, lack of foresight, unpreparedness,—things in themselves apparently venial,—are in reality symptomatic of something far more serious; and that far more serious thing, which is here implied, appears elsewhere in our Lord's teaching in naked clarity (for example, in the next parable that we shall consider, the parable of the Talents),—we mean *the lack of the sense of responsibility*, the attitude of mind which regards duty as a matter of minor importance, the deplorable state of those who will not trouble to take serious things seriously. This, we maintain, is implied in the behaviour of the five foolish virgins; so that the teaching of the parable, so far from being appropriate only to those who first heard it, is of universal application, however the "Second Coming" be interpreted. "They took no oil with them" implies the lack of the sense of responsibility, which, in one form or another, must result in ruin.

The parable continues: "Now while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept." There is no point in asking why the bridegroom tarried; the words are simply illustrative of what is said in Matth. xxiv. 6, "the end is not yet." In view of the concluding words of the parable, "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour," it might be inferred that to slumber at such a time was to fail in their duty; but as they all slumbered, the wise as well as the foolish, it is clearly not intended that this is to be looked upon as blameworthy; it is merely a scenic detail; provided they were prepared, the virgins would be ready at any moment.

"But at midnight there is a cry, Behold the bridegroom! Come forth to meet him." Here again it would be pointless to see any special significance in the midnight hour, or to ask who it is who raises the cry; all that is intended is to lay stress on the suddenness of the coming.

"Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out. But the wise answered, saying, Peradventure there will not be enough for us and for you; go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves." The

request: "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out," implies the probability that there was enough oil in the vessels of the wise virgins to share with the others; though it must be allowed that normally this would not have been the case, for the ordinary oil-vessels would not be large enough to contain more than was sufficient for one occasion only. However, the answer of the wise virgins implies the possibility of their having more than was sufficient for their own wants: "Peradventure [μήποτε "perhaps"] there will not be enough for us and for you." The thoughtlessness and unpreparedness of the five foolish virgins is undoubtedly the main point; but there is something else here which inevitably rises to the mind: the five foolish virgins are in evil plight; true, they had nobody but themselves to thank for this; but it is a fundamental Christian principle to help others if they are in trouble or difficulty, even though it be through their own fault that they are suffering; that is the teaching in such parables as the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Sheep and Goats—whatever else they teach—and elsewhere. So that the refusal on the part of the five wise virgins to help their companions who were in difficulties seems, at first sight, to be somewhat churlish and uncharitable. But that is not the case. The refusal of the five wise virgins has been interpreted to mean that "every man must live by his own faith,"<sup>1</sup> as though the words were an illustration of: "Am I my brother's keeper?" Or else, it is said in explanation, that "preparedness is a quality, not a something which can be shared quantitatively,"<sup>2</sup> which is, of course, true; but not, we think, quite the point here. The principle inculcated is something deeper and more far-reaching. In the conditions depicted in the parable the primary duty of all the virgins was to the *bridegroom*; that came first; to that all else had to be subordinated. Doubtless they had a duty to their companions in distress; but their thoughts were concentrated on their duty to the bridegroom; when the higher duty claimed fulfilment the lesser one could not be con-

<sup>1</sup> Trench, *Notes on the Parables of our Lord*, p. 253 (1886).

<sup>2</sup> McNeile, *op. cit.*, p. 362.



sidered. If we are right in this interpretation, the episode illustrates a principle the carrying-out of which is sometimes among the most difficult and perplexing in life; but the parable points the way which must be followed. Over and over again men are faced with a conflict of duties in which a problem is involved which is difficult of solution. Conditions are constantly arising in which an imperative duty to our neighbour seems to conflict with our duty to God. The alternative is often hard; sometimes it seems cruel. Yet the fact must be frankly faced: if the teaching of Christ is to be followed, duty to God comes first. When a conflict of duties presents itself, and the danger arises of offending friends, of unwillingly making enemies, of damaging one's own interests, there is only one way, one solution, hard as it must often be,—everything must be subordinated to what conscience declares to be duty to God. On one occasion a disciple said to our Lord: "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. But Jesus saith unto him, Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead" <sup>1</sup> (Matth. viii. 21, 22). It was a hard saying; but in that conflict of duties there could be no doubt as to which should be followed.

The parable continues: "And while they went away to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage feast; and the door was shut." The central purpose of the teaching of the parable is expressed in the words, "they that were ready." With this verse and that which follows we are irresistibly reminded of the words in Lk. xiii. 24-28: "Strive to enter in by the narrow door; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, open to us; and he shall answer and say to you, I know you not whence ye are; then shall ye begin to say . . ."

Some commentators are of opinion that in its original

<sup>1</sup> The usually held and most obvious meaning of the words is: "Leave the spiritually dead to bury their own dead"; cp. Matth. x. 37: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me."



form the parable concluded with the words, "and the door was shut" (verse 10); but we question whether the reasons are conclusive. That in what follows our Lord appears as judge is no valid reason why the closing words should not be regarded as genuine:

"Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know not the day nor the hour."

A remarkably interesting illustration of the picture presented in this parable, taken from real life in India, is worth giving:<sup>1</sup>

"The bridegroom came from a distant city, and the bride dwelt in Serampore, whither he journeyed by water. After a wait of from two to three hours, it was at last announced as midnight approached,—precisely in the words of Holy Writ—'Behold the bridegroom! Come forth to meet him!' All those taking part in the ceremony lighted their lamps, and, carrying them in their hands, hastened to take their places in the procession. But some of them had mislaid their lamps, and were not prepared to take their places; but it was now too late to go and find their lamps; and the procession moved on to the house of the bride. The company then entered into a large, beautifully illuminated courtyard. The bridegroom, borne on the arms of his friends, was placed in a gorgeous seat in the centre of the assembly. Very soon after he entered into the house, and the door was shut behind him, and guarded by sepoys. I and others, desiring to enter, appealed to the watchman at the door; but in vain. Never was I so struck by the realism of our Lord's beautiful parable as in that moment when 'the door was shut.'"

The parable of the Ten Virgins, then, following upon the discourse on the "last things" in Matth. xxiv, is eschatological. Its primary purpose is to declare that those whose unpreparedness reveals their lack of the sense of responsibility will be excluded from entering into the Kingdom of

<sup>1</sup> It is quoted by Bugge, *op. cit.*, pp. 340 ff., from Ward, *View of the Hindoo*, ii. 29.

Heaven. The bridegroom represents the Messiah; the five wise virgins represent those who are "looking for the consolation of Israel" (Lk. ii. 25), and are prepared for the coming of the Messiah; the five foolish virgins represent those who, while expecting the advent of the Messiah, are careless and thoughtless in preparing for His coming; the marriage feast represents the Kingdom. This is all perfectly clear. But, as has already been remarked, while a parable has usually one central purpose, there are implications which cannot be dealt with in detail in the parable because attention must not be detracted from the main theme. We have drawn attention to one of these; another is concerned with what constitutes preparedness for the Kingdom. But there is a further one, likewise of supreme importance, which must be mentioned; its full significance does not appear until it is elaborated in the parable which follows; and it cannot be too strongly insisted upon that the three parables in Matth. xxv form a whole; they must be regarded as links in a chain, being all three connected with one another. This will become clear as we proceed.

Now this further implication in our parable centres in this: all the virgins had lamps, but only five could use them when the critical moment arrived. It is not indicated how the virgins became possessed of their lamps, indispensable for their duties,—though the use and non-use of them is brought out clearly. There is in this, we believe, more than appears upon the surface. In the light of what is taught in the second link of the chain, the parable of the Talents, we are justified in affirming that the possession of the lamps is intended to imply the divine endowment of grace, while the use or non-use of them is intended to imply the action of free will. Having said this, let us turn to the closely connected parable of the Talents. ✓

## THE PARABLE OF THE TALENTS

[Matth. xxv. 14-30; cp. Lk. xix. 12-27]

Before coming to deal in detail with this parable, it is demanded that we should briefly consider the question of the connexion, if any, between it and the somewhat similar parable of the Pounds in Lk. xix. 12-27. While there are considerable differences in detail between these two parables, there can be no doubt that so far as the central teaching is concerned there is identity between them. But the question naturally arises as to whether these were originally two different parables, or two forms of one original parable; if the former, which of the two is the earlier; if the latter, how are the marked differences between the two forms as we now have them to be accounted for? Apart from anything else, it is a matter of distinct interest and importance from the point of view of the transmission of the Gospel records.

The view that the parable of the Talents and the parable of the Pounds were originally two distinct parables cannot be dismissed off-hand, for there are some striking differences between them; that both parables teach the same central truth is no argument against this view, because an important truth may well be reiterated in varying external form. On the other hand, the fact that in each of these parables some more or less identical passages occur does not necessarily mean that both go back to one original; for, as a matter of fact, the few passages that are identical in each are not the decisive ones, excepting in the one case (Lk. xix. 26): "I say unto you, that unto every one that hath shall be given [Matth. xxv. 29: "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance"]; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him"; but this is a passage that occurs elsewhere too (Matth. xiii. 12; Mk. iv. 25; Lk. viii. 18), and is of wide application. While there are a few passages, more or less identical in each of these two parables, the bulk of the material, so far as the external form is con-

cerned, is different in each. The view, therefore, that these are, and always were, distinct, though teaching the same central lesson, is at least tenable. Those scholars who hold that we have here two forms of an originally single parable, account for the differences on the ground of oral transmission. For this view, too, there is much to be said; yet in face of the many differences which the two parables contain, the other view, that the two were originally distinct, seems the more probable.<sup>1</sup> We have here another illustration of the existence of a current parabolic theme upon which the parable is constructed; the theme may be susceptible of more than one lesson, or it may be one from which only a single lesson can be deduced; so that, if two parables are constructed upon such a theme, they are in one sense distinct, but, as both are based on a common source, they are also in some sense identical; in other words, these two parables are one in origin, but two in construction. There would thus be truth in both the views mentioned. But as, in any case, both parables teach the same central truth, it will not be necessary to deal with each; we shall concentrate on the parable of the Talents on account of its slightly fuller detail.

The opening words of this parable show very clearly that it is linked on to that of the Ten Virgins, and must be read in continuation of it, without a break, as it were. The Greek "for" (*γάρ*) indicates here that that which follows is going to elucidate something in the preceding parable; and the word "as" (*ὡσπερ*) might be rendered, "thus"; the Revised Version has: "For (it is) as (when) a man . . ."; that does not quite represent the Greek, which is literally, "For thus," explanatory of what has gone before; and then it continues: "A man going into a far country, called. . . ." But the important point is to discern what is referred to in the previous parable by this continuation-formula, "For thus"; and that can be discerned only when the central point in the teaching of this second parable is grasped. The keynote is sounded at the outset, where it is said that

<sup>1</sup> Dodd holds that the two parables "are clearly variant versions of the same parable" (*op. cit.*, p. 146).



the man called his servants, "and delivered unto them his goods" (*i.e.* the talents); the master's goods; the servants would not be able to do anything unless this gift or loan afforded them the opportunity for action. Here we get the point of attachment with the previous parable; the virgins are given their lamps, the indispensable condition of being able to enter into the marriage feast. The initial gift in this parable, which endows the recipient with the capacity of acting, represents the gift of divine grace, which, if rightly used, enables him to do the will of God. This is borne out by the words of the parable which follow: "And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one." Five talents would be approximately equivalent to £1200 of our money; even one talent (£240), when one remembers the vastly greater value of money in those days, was a large sum; and for a slave<sup>1</sup> to have such a sum at his disposal would be quite abnormal; there was no possibility of his obtaining it by his own efforts. The truth implied is, of course, that divine grace is something utterly unobtainable by man, it is only granted as the gift of God.

The parable continues, saying that the number of talents given to each of the servants was "according to his several ability." The lord of the servants knows, that is to say, the capabilities of each, and does not expect more from each one than he is able to offer, thus representing the truth that the power of exercising free will is not the same in all men; what is expected is in proportion to that power; hence the five talents, two talents, and one talent, with the subsequent result of their use. In its wider application this is a truth of profound significance which is worth a moment's consideration. Regarding the excellence of good qualities in men, there are necessarily two estimates; there is the estimate of men, and there is the estimate of God. Men give the greater honour to him whom they conceive to be the better man—and who is doubtless often the better man—because he possesses the more brilliant talents, and uses them. Another has less brilliant talents; but he, too, uses

<sup>1</sup> The word in the Greek denotes "bond-servant" or "slave" (*δοῦλος*), as distinct from the "household-servant" (*οἰκέτης*).

them to the best of his ability; yet the latter, rightly enough from the world's point of view, receives the lesser recognition. That is according to man's estimate of things; and, speaking generally, it is difficult to see how things could well be otherwise. Nevertheless, man's estimate, even at its best, is not wholly just; for if a man gives of his best he is doing his utmost, and more cannot be expected of him. For perfect justice to have sway, therefore, he who does the utmost in him, though he be but the lesser man, ought to receive as much recognition as the greater man with brilliant talents, who also does his best, but no more than that; but from the nature of the case that is impossible in human affairs. So that man's estimate, the world being what it is, cannot be perfectly just in this, though it tries to be, because in its view results count for more than intentions, however excellent. This is one of the truths which, we believe, may legitimately be deduced from the teaching of this parable.

It then continues: "Straightway he that received the five talents went and traded with them, and made five other talents. In like manner he also that (received) the two gained other two. But he that received the one went away and digged in the earth, and hid his lord's money." Here there is set forth the perfect balance in regard to the relative spheres of grace and free will. The receiving of the talents by each of the servants, respectively, represents the divine gift of grace; but when once the talents are placed in their keeping the servants have absolute freedom to do what they will with them; that represents human free will. As has been well pointed out,<sup>1</sup> the Greek for "traded with them" (*ἡργάσατο ἐν αὐτοῖς*) implies busy action in conjunction with continued industry; in pointed contrast, therefore, to the slothful servant who hid his talent in a hole in the earth.

Then comes the reckoning: "And he that received the five talents came and brought other five talents"; these words emphasize again the teaching on grace and free will; the first five talents are brought back as a matter of course; and the bringing of the second five talents indicates that

<sup>1</sup> Bugge, *op. cit.*, p. 359.

the servant recognized that his ability to gain these was due only to his having been entrusted with his lord's money. He makes no boast of having gained these; he had done his duty to the best of his ability; it was the utmost he could do; but he had done no more than what he ought to have done: "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Lk. xvii. 10); that can be felt and said only when it is recognized that it is of grace that free will is exercised. "And his lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant"; good, for he gave honour to his lord, recognizing that it was through an act of grace that he, the servant, had been enabled to work; faithful, because he had done his part in exercising his free will in the right way. To the servant who had received two talents, and gained other two, the lord says similar words, bearing out what has already been said regarding the difference between God's estimate and man's estimate of achievement. Then comes the third servant, who had received one talent, and had hidden it instead of making use of it; he pleads in extenuation of his slothfulness that he knew his lord was "a hard man," meaning that he was exacting, and would demand his rights to the uttermost; the excuse was both foolish and criminal, for if he knew that his lord was "hard," the more need to conciliate him by doing what he, the servant, knew was expected of him; and, further, his lord was not hard, otherwise he would not have given his servant the means of trading, but would have commanded him to do so without help; it was only a lame excuse such as is offered in the consciousness of guilt; he had despised his lord's bounty. As to the words: ". . . reaping where thou didst not sow, and gathering where thou didst not scatter," which have been variously interpreted, we doubt whether they are really capable of application; Montefiore is probably right in saying that they are "part of the dramatic environment of the parable, which must not be pressed in its moral";<sup>1</sup> traits of this kind are thoroughly characteristic

<sup>1</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels*, ii. 749.



of Jewish parabolic form. In reply the lord says: "thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the bankers, and at my coming I should have received back mine own with interest";<sup>1</sup> these words mean that the servant, in spite of his sloth and fear, should, at any rate, have had some concern for his lord's interests as being in his service; that they are not intended to represent the lord as avaricious is clear from what is said in the next verse; the one talent is taken from him who was unworthy of it; but it is not the lord, though it is his own money, who takes it back; it is given to him who had ten talents. "For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away"; with slight differences these words occur in xiii. 12, Mk. iv. 25, Lk. viii. 18. It is held by some commentators that this verse is an interpolation, being added from Mk. iv. 25; with this we must wholly disagree; the words come in most appropriately and stand in direct connexion with the teaching of the parable. It has already been insisted that this teaching centres on the need of divine grace; in the light of this, therefore, these words must be understood thus: the grace of God is given to every man; the realization of this possession and making use of it invariably results in its increase; he who uses the grace of God receives more grace; he has abundance: "Unto every one that hath shall be given." But he who, having received the gift of the grace of God, makes no effort to use it, inevitably suffers loss; he has deliberately spurned the gift, and it is, therefore, withdrawn: "from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away"; the non-use of the grace of God results in the loss of the faculty of using it.<sup>2</sup> The parable ends with the words:

<sup>1</sup> In Exod. xxii. 25 [24 in Hebr.], Lev. xxv. 36, 37, Deut. xxiii. 19, 20 [20, 21 in Hebr.] lending for interest is forbidden between Israelites, but it is permitted between an Israelite and a Gentile.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd takes a somewhat different view: "When we recall that there was a tendency to turn the sayings of Jesus, which were uttered in reference to a particular situation, into general maxims for the guidance of the Church, we can no longer feel sure that the 'moral' appended in the early traditional source to the parable of the Talents is original. As Matthew found in the parable of the Defendant (Matth. v. 25, 26 and Lk. xii. 57-59) an exhortation to reconciliation, and as Luke found in the parable of the Lamp and the



“And cast ye out the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (cf. viii. 12, xxii. 13). There is much to be said in favour of regarding this verse as not being part of the original parable; “outer darkness” and “weeping and gnashing of teeth” describe conditions in Gehenna as this is depicted in Jewish eschatological thought; but how can the lord of the parable, who is represented as a purely earthly personality, have the power or the right to consign his slothful servant to hell? Again, the servant has already been punished by being deprived of the talent; a second punishment, especially one of this nature, is not called for; nor is this punishment commensurate with the offence; the talent was brought back, it was not stolen. And, once more, the verse is out of harmony with the environment and scene of the parable. We are, therefore, justified in regarding this verse as a later insertion added with the purpose of putting an eschatological meaning on to it and thus connecting it with the discourse on the last things which precedes these three parables.

The picture presented in the parable is as simple as its application is clear: using the means offered for making worldly profit is rewarded by increased prosperity, neglect to use the means spells ruin; using the grace of God increases godliness, spurning it is to fall from grace. For the purposes of practical religion no parable could be of greater value.<sup>1</sup>

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Bushel an illustration of the principle that truth shines by its own light, so at an early stage the parable of the Money in Trust was used to illustrate the maxim that a man who possesses spiritual capacity will enlarge that capacity by experience, while a man who has none will decline into a worse condition as time goes on. That the maxim is an original saying of Jesus is fairly certain, in view of its multiple attestation, but its original application is lost beyond recall” (*op. cit.*, pp. 148 f.).

<sup>1</sup> Dodd's interpretation of the parable is, in some respects, different; he holds that “the central interest lies in the scene of the reckoning, and in particular in the position of the cautious servant, whose hopeful complacency receives so rude a rebuff. . . . All is contrived to throw into strong relief the character of the scrupulous servant who will take no risks. . . . Here is a man who with money to use will not risk its loss by investment, but hoards it in a stocking. . . . But, further, the money belongs to someone else, and was entrusted to him for investment. His over-caution then takes a worse colour. It amounts to a breach of trust. He is an unprofitable servant, a barren rascal. That is the judgement which the parable is intended to elicit”

## THE PARABLE OF THE SHEEP AND GOATS

[Matth. xxv. 31-46]

We come now to the last of the three parables in this cycle. It cannot, it is true, be called a parable in the generally accepted meaning of the word; for though it contains elements of the ordinary parabolic kind, it is a picture, partly allegorical and partly prophetic, of the coming of Christ in His glory, and of the final judgement.

We have in this section an elaboration of Matth. xvi. 27: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds," see also Mk. viii. 38; Lk. ix. 26.

It is important to realize at the outset that Matth. xxv. 31-46 presents an eschatological theme which is unique only in form, but not in essence. To make this clear it will be necessary to give a few quotations from the apocalyptic literature.

A remarkable vision of the final judgement is given in Enoch lxii. and lxiii;<sup>1</sup> it is too long to quote in full, but the salient passages are as follows:

"And the Lord of Spirits seated him [*i.e.* the Elect One = the Messiah] on the throne of His glory; and the spirit of righteousness was poured out upon him, and the word of his mouth slays all sinners. . . . And there shall stand up in that day all the kings and the mighty. . . . And they shall see and recognize how he sits on the throne of his glory; and righteousness is judged before him, and no lying word is spoken before him. . . . And one portion of them shall look on the other, and they

(*op. cit.*, pp. 150 f.). The unprofitable servant represents "the type of pious Jew who came in for so much criticism in the Gospels. He seeks personal security in a meticulous observance of the Law . . . by a policy of selfish exclusiveness, he makes the religion of Israel barren . . ." (*op. cit.*, pp. 151 f.). This very interesting exposition shows how susceptible the parables are of different interpretations.

<sup>1</sup> This is from that section of the book of Enoch (xxxvii-lxxi and xci-civ), called the "Parables" or "Similitudes," which belongs to 105-64 B.C.; see Charles, *The Book of Enoch*, p. xi. (1912); the translation from the Ethiopic given above is that of Charles.

shall be terrified, and they shall be downcast of countenance, and pain shall seize them, when they see that Son of Man sitting on the throne of his glory. . . . And the congregation of the elect and the holy shall be sown, and all the elect shall stand before him on that day. And all the kings and the mighty, and the exalted, and those who rule the earth, shall fall down before him on their faces, and worship and set their hope upon that Son of Man, and petition him and supplicate for mercy at his hands. Nevertheless, that Lord of Spirits will so press them, that they shall go forth from His presence. . . . And He will deliver them to the angels for punishment, to execute vengeance on them because they have oppressed His children and His elect. And they shall be a spectacle for the righteous and for His elect. . . . And the righteous and elect will be saved on that day. . . . And the Lord of Spirits will abide over them, and with that Son of Man shall they eat, and lie down and rise up for ever and ever. . . . And they shall be clothed with garments of glory, and these shall be the garments of life from the Lord of Spirits. In those days shall the mighty and the kings who possess the earth implore (Him) to grant them a little respite from His angels of punishment. . . . For we have not believed before Him, nor glorified the name of the Lord of Spirits; but our hope was in the sceptre of our kingdom, and in our glory. . . . Now will they say unto themselves, 'Our souls are full of unrighteous gain, but it does not prevent us from descending from the midst thereof into the burden of the flame of Sheol.' "

In comparing this passage with the parable of the Sheep and Goats, Burkitt pointedly remarks: "It is surely impossible not to recognise a real literary connexion between these pictures of the Judgement. In both we read of 'the Son of Man,' who 'sits on the throne of his glory'; in both the 'righteous' get their vindication and reward, while the adversaries, to their surprise, are banished to flame and torment. The one picture is evidently an adaptation of the other, and the question arises which is

the pattern and which is the copy. . . . But when we pass from considerations of value to considerations of priority, there can be little doubt that Enoch is the original. It is just one of those cases where St. Paul's canon applies: 'Howbeit, that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual' (1 Cor. xv. 46).<sup>1</sup>

The scene of the final Judgement in an abridged form, but exhibiting the essential traits, occurs also in 2 (4) Esdras (the "Ezra Apocalypse") vii. 33-38: "And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgement; and compassion shall pass away, and longsuffering shall be withdrawn; but judgement only shall remain, truth shall stand, and faith shall wax strong; and the work shall follow, and the reward shall be shewed, and good deeds shall awake, and wicked deeds shall not sleep. And the pit of torment shall appear, and over against it shall be the place of rest; and the furnace of hell shall be shewed, and over against it the paradise of delight. And then shall the Most High say to the nations that are raised from the dead, See ye and understand whom ye have denied, or whom ye have not served, or whose commandments ye have despised. Look on this side and on that: here is delight and rest, and there fire and torments. . . ." Similar, but more abridged, is the picture in the Apocalypse of Baruch lxxxiii. 1, 2: "For the Most High will assuredly hasten His times, and He will assuredly bring on His hours; and He will assuredly judge those who are in His world, and will visit in truth all things by means of all their hidden works."<sup>2</sup>

This eschatological theme was thus current in Jewish circles. It was stated above that the picture presented in Matth. xxv. 31-46 is an elaboration of the words of Matth. xvi. 27; = Mk. viii. 38; Lk. ix. 26; and this will be generally acknowledged to be the case. But it is necessary to bear in mind that in both Matthew and Luke the words

<sup>1</sup> *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, pp. 24 f. (1914).

<sup>2</sup> Charles, *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, pp. 140 f. (1896). Both this and the *Ezra Apocalypse* belong approximately to A.D. 100.



which follow, run: "Verily, I say unto you, there be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom"; Luke has: ". . . till they see the Kingdom of God." But the Kingdom of God, in the sense intended by this "parable," has not come yet. This makes it difficult to believe that our Lord uttered this "parable" in the form in which we now have it. This is confirmed by the presence of some words which are not in the spirit of Christ's teaching: "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels" (verse 41); "And these shall go away into eternal punishment" (verse 46); these words express Jewish eschatological ideas, which were, unfortunately, appropriated by the early Church. We are, therefore, led to believe that we have in Matth. xxv. 31-46 one of our Lord's parables which was edited eschatologically in somewhat later days. It was placed appropriately in its present position, for the two parables which precede it were likewise interpreted in a Jewish eschatological sense.

Though it is impossible to indicate precisely what the original form of our "parable" may have been, that does not affect the wonderful beauty of its teaching; "one of the noblest passages in the entire Gospel."<sup>1</sup> Like the two preceding parables, it deals with the Kingdom, though with the members of the Kingdom rather than with its nature.

Some details of the "parable" must now be considered. In verse 32 it is said: ". . . and before him shall be gathered all the nations; and he shall separate them one from another . . ."; these words imply that Christianity has already been established throughout the world, that what is said in Matth. xxiv. 14 ("And this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come") has already happened; but, as we have seen, Christ taught that the coming of the Son of Man would take place within the life-

<sup>1</sup> Montefiore, *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 752.

time of some of those to whom He spoke. We have here, therefore, a Jewish apocalyptic trait taken over by the evangelist, and put into the mouth of our Lord. The judgement of the nations is a thought that occurs frequently in Jewish eschatological writings. In the earliest phases of its conception the object of the Judgement to take place at the end of the present age was that the Gentile enemies of the Jews might be condemned to punishment, and that the Jews themselves might thereby be freed from oppression; of many illustrations of this, one may be given here from the *Assumption of Moses*<sup>1</sup> x. 1 ff.: "And then His Kingdom shall appear throughout all His creation . . . For the Heavenly One will arise from His royal throne, and He will go forth from His holy habitation with indignation and wrath on account of His sons. . . . For the Most High will arise, the Eternal God alone, and He will appear to punish the Gentiles, and He will destroy all their idols. Then thou, O Israel, shalt be happy . . . and God will exalt thee."

But a further object of the Judgement often appears in the Jewish apocalyptic literature, one of a more ethical character; this was in order that the powers of evil, Satan at their head, should be destroyed; here the idea is not that of the liberation of the Jews from their Gentile oppressors, but release from the bonds of sin. At the final Judgement Satan and all the powers of evil will be destroyed. One illustration will suffice; in the *Testaments of the xii Patriarchs*, Levi iii. 3, the patriarch is shown "the hosts of the armies which are ordained for the day of Judgement, to work vengeance on the spirits of deceit and of Beliar" (= Satan).<sup>2</sup> There is a third stage in the Jewish conception of the Judgement, and this is that of the judgement of the *individual*; before the Judgement-seat there stand not only those who are the enemies of all that is good, but men as men, those of past generations, those who lie

<sup>1</sup> This apocalypse was written, according to Charles, between A.D. 7 and 30.

<sup>2</sup> Cp. verse 41 in our parable: "the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels."

in the grave, and those who are still living; the purpose of the Judgement is to pronounce the lot of eternity for this man and that man, the separation of those destined to bliss and those who are condemned to perdition.<sup>1</sup> The most sublime form of this final development of the Judgement is that which we are at present considering:

"Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand" (verse 34); for our Lord to speak of Himself as "King" just after the title of "the Son of man," in verse 31, is unexpected; He never speaks of Himself as King; whenever He uses this title it is in reference to God (Matth. v. 34, 35, xxii. 2 ff.); the thought of the Messiah as King belongs to Jewish apocalyptic literature (*e.g.* Enoch xc. 37 ff., Sib. Orac. iii. 652, Pss. of Solomon xvii. 23).

"I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat . . ." (verses 35, 36): there is a remarkable parallel to this so far as the words are concerned, in the *Test. xii. Patriarchs*, Joseph i. 5, 6: ". . . I was beset with hunger, and the Lord Himself nourished me. I was alone, and God comforted me; I was sick, and the Lord visited me; I was in prison, and my God showed favour unto me; in bonds, and He released me . . ." the acts of kindness mentioned in the verses before us are, as Montefiore truly says, "characteristically Jewish instances of 'Gemiluth Chesadim,' the doing of loving-kindnesses."<sup>2</sup>

One of the most striking thoughts in this beautiful "parable" is contained in verses 37-39: "Lord, when saw we thee an hungered and fed thee? or athirst, and gave thee drink? . . ." This does not mean that the righteous had forgotten all about their kind acts; it points rather to the truth that benevolence becomes second nature to those who constantly practise it; they are kind instinctively, unconsciously.

"Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren,

<sup>1</sup> See, for a full treatment of the subject, Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*, pp. 89 ff. (1934).

<sup>2</sup> *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 754; numberless illustrations of this teaching occur both in post-Biblical Jewish literature and in Rabbinical writings.

even these least, ye did it unto me": on these words we must again quote Montefiore: "How many deeds of charity and love, how many acts of sacrifice and devotion, must have been accomplished in the last eighteen hundred years by the remembrance of these words!"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 752.



# THE LUCAN PARABLES



## LECTURE IX

### THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN

[Lk. x. 29-37]

### AND THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

[Lk. xii. 16-21]

THE circumstances which prompted the utterance of the parable of the Good Samaritan are as follows: A certain lawyer asks Christ what he must do to inherit eternal life; Christ says to him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou?" the lawyer, in reply, quotes Deut. vi. 5, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God . . .",<sup>1</sup> and Lev. xix. 18, "thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thereupon Christ says to him: "Thou hast answered right; this do, and thou shalt live"; but the lawyer, desirous of justifying himself, retorts: "And who is my neighbour?" (Lk. x. 25-29); thereupon follows our parable.

It should be noted that the question: "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" occurs also in another context, and the answer *differs* from that which is here given in so far that it is concerned solely with duty to one's neighbour, yet that is also the case with the parable of the Good Samaritan. The point is only mentioned to show the possibility that Lk. x. 25-28 stood originally in some other context. This seems the more likely in that the parallel passages to Lk. x. 25-28, viz. Matth. xxii. 34-40; Mk. xii. 28-31, occur in quite different connexions, but the parable is given in Luke alone. A comparison between these three parallel passages will be found instructive. In Matthew and Mark the question put to our Lord is: "Which is the great commandment of the law?" and: "What command-

<sup>1</sup> This is part of what is called the *Shema* (from the opening word "Hear" in Deut. vi. 4); it consists of Deut. vi. 4-9, xi. 13-21, Num. xv. 37-41; and is the nearest approach to a Creed in Judaism; it is evidently referred to in Mk. xii. 29.

ment is the first of all? ” In Luke the question is: “ What shall I do to inherit eternal life? ” In Matthew and Mark the quotations from the Old Testament are uttered by our Lord; in Luke it is the lawyer who quotes them. In Matthew and Mark the two quotations are separate; in Luke they are run into one. In comparing the three passages one is led to surmise, as Fiebig says, that Lk. x. 25-28 “ formed originally an independent piece in the tradition ”;<sup>1</sup> and if that is so, these verses did not originally stand as an introduction to the parable, and it follows that verse 29 (“ But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour? ”) was added by the evangelist to form the link between the two pieces, Lk. x. 25-28 and 30-37. If this theory be accepted, it explains a real difficulty. For verse 29 contains the lawyer’s question: “ Who is my neighbour? ” and the parable teaches that his neighbour is the man who fell among thieves—in other words, any man who is in distress and needs help is a neighbour. But in verse 36 our Lord says to the lawyer: “ Which of these three, thinkest thou, proved neighbour unto him that fell among the robbers? ” And the lawyer answers: “ He that shewed mercy on him,” *i.e.* the Samaritan. But that is not an answer to the question, “ Who is my neighbour? ” And our Lord says to the lawyer: “ Go, and do thou likewise,” *i.e.* do as the Samaritan did; but the parable is not intended to teach that, in answer to the lawyer’s question, the Samaritan was his neighbour. That there is an incongruity here will not be denied; the various attempts made to gloss it over or to explain it away are not convincing. The solution is simple when one sees in Lk. x. 25-28 and x. 30-37 two originally independent pieces, the former having been utilized as an introduction to the latter, while verse 29 was added to form the connecting link between the two. It is true that in this case verses 25-28, and 29, cannot be regarded as having originally recounted the circumstances which led up to the utterance of the parable; but that does not affect the intrinsic value and importance of each of these two passages.

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 218.



We turn now to the parable itself. The realistic way in which it is presented, yet in simple words, is characteristic of our Lord's method of teaching. The scene of the robbery was well known as a neighbourhood of evil repute. The way down from Jerusalem to Jericho led through a wild and lonely stretch of road on which roving bands of Bedawin were frequently gathered on the look-out for plunder. Jerome, referring to it in the *Onomasticon*, says that it was called "the red," or "the bloody way"; so evil was its repute that in much later times a small garrison was stationed there for the protection of travellers. Even as late as the middle of last century, we are told by travellers, that when they went from Jerusalem to Jericho it was absolutely necessary to come to some arrangement with the local sheikhs, by means of a money payment, in order to secure themselves against attack by the Bedawin; if some such payment was not made it was practically certain that an attempt at robbery would be undertaken. Such being the case even in modern times, it is easy to visualize the state of affairs in antiquity.

In taking this road of ill repute as the scene of the parable, our Lord knew that He was striking a note of painful interest to His hearers, and was, therefore, assured of close attention. As to the man who fell among robbers, it is to be noted that while our Lord carefully specifies the exact types of men who came along the road—a priest, a Levite, and a Samaritan—the central personality of the whole story, the poor maltreated object of pity, is spoken of quite indefinitely as "a certain man"; doubtless a Jew, for the road from Jerusalem to Jericho was mainly frequented by Jews; the point clearly is that, according to Christ's teaching, any and every man has the right, as a man, to claim the sympathy and help of his fellow-man if he is in danger or want; he is a "neighbour."

The narrative continues: "And by chance a certain priest was going down that way . . ."; the Greek expression for "by chance" (*κατὰ συγκυρίαν*) does not, according to Bugge, mean blind chance, but rather that concatenation of circumstances which, though often apparently fortuitous,

is in truth that intricate interweaving of the threads of the destiny of different individuals which is due to the act of divine providence.<sup>1</sup> That is a fine thought; but whether it can be rightly attributed to our Lord in the present connexion is uncertain.<sup>2</sup>

The priest and the Levite who passed by that way and took no notice of the victim of cruel maltreatment, were representatives of that Jewish Law which taught the love of one's neighbour; but the most outstanding official teachers of the Law were the lawyers. Not one of these latter, however, is represented as having passed by that way, though he would have been the most obvious to be mentioned as the teacher of the Law *par excellence*; our Lord's gentle tactfulness is, therefore, worthy of note, since He was primarily addressing a lawyer.

Very significant is the mention of a Samaritan as the one who showed pity on the wounded man. The Samaritans were non-Jews; had it been a Jew who had ministered to the victim, his pity might have been put down to fellow-feeling for a compatriot. To the Jews the Samaritans were "strangers," and were regarded with supreme contempt;<sup>3</sup> the scribes had an especial dislike for them. The Samaritans were publicly cursed in the synagogues; and a petition was daily offered up praying God that the Samaritans might not be partakers of eternal life. The testimony of a Samaritan was inadmissible in Jewish courts. It was thus a member of this despised race whom Christ chose as a champion of the law of love. On the other hand, it must be emphasized that no word of condemnation is uttered against either the priest or the Levite; they were the victims of a system which, while good in many respects, fell short in others. The priest and the Levite were, it is true, guilty of non-observance of their own Law as far as the spirit of it was concerned; but the Law nowhere explicitly mentions a case

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 394.

<sup>2</sup> Jülicher regards it as merely a current expression without any deeper meaning, *op. cit.*, ii. p. 587.

<sup>3</sup> Cp. Eccus. i. 25, 26: "Against two nations doth my soul feel abhorrence, and (against) a third, (which is) not a people: the inhabitants of Seir [= Idumæa], and Philistia, and that foolish nation which dwelleth in Sichem [= Samaria]"; this is from the Hebrew.

of the kind presented in the parable, so that it could have been pleaded that neither the priest nor the Levite had broken the letter of the Law. It was just here that the fundamental difference existed between Christ and the Jewish religious leaders of His day. To begin with, the Law was in itself inadequate because, according to it, its obligations did not, except in quite a few exceptional instances, extend beyond members of the Jewish race; so that, according to Jewish ideas of the time, the action of the Samaritan was, in any case, a work of supererogation. But further, according to the teaching and practice of the exponents of the Law, it sufficed if the letter of the Law were observed; and, where a case arose for which no provision was made in the Law, a man was not held guilty even though he might be involved in a non-observance of its spirit. The whole reason of the growth and development of the Oral Law was the need of providing for the ever-increasing new cases which the experiences of life brought to the fore. The *system*, therefore, was to blame; so that the priest and the Levite are looked upon as victims of an evil, or at least an inadequate, system. Here in this parable was presented an example of the kind of case for which the Law, according to its letter, made no provision. It can, of course, be urged that for anyone who was conscientious enough to keep the spirit of the Law the enactment given in Lev. xix. 18 was amply sufficient; but the system in vogue in our Lord's time did not make this obligatory.

Then there is another consideration which must not be overlooked. When we read that both the priest and the Levite "passed by on the other side," there is a natural feeling of indignation at such callous indifference in the presence of a suffering fellow-creature. But there is something to be said in extenuation of this behaviour when one realizes the belief of the times. It is taught again and again in the Old Testament that misfortune and suffering among men are the marks of God's judgement for sin, whether their own, or those of their forefathers; it is unnecessary to give quotations, the fact is sufficiently well known. That the belief was held equally in our Lord's



time is clear from Jn. ix. 2: "And his disciples asked him, saying, Rabbi, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" That the priest and the Levite held this belief, too, cannot be doubted; this being so, may it not be that they hesitated to interfere in what they believed to be the act of God? No word of blame is uttered against either; they were the victims of a false belief. To condemn that false belief may well have been a subsidiary purpose of the parable.

There is, then, some justification for saying that our Lord's object in putting forth this parable, primarily for the benefit of an official exponent of the Law, was two-fold: He wished, first, to show the inadequacy of the Law in that it restricted an Israelite's obligations to his neighbour to those of his own race; this concerned the Written Law. He wished also to show the shortcoming of a legal system which, while insisting rigidly on the need of keeping the letter of the Law, did not make the observance of the spirit of the Law obligatory; this concerned the Oral Law, which was the outcome of experience. In dealing with the former, Christ takes a despised Samaritan—one who recognized the same written Law as the Jews—and represents him as fulfilling the law of love in respect of one not of his own nation. In dealing with the latter, Christ takes examples of those recognized as exponents of the Law, and shows how cruel even a legal purist can be if he keeps rigidly only to the letter of the Law without observing its spirit. He wished also to show the cruel results of a false belief regarding God's dealings with men.

This parable is, therefore, one of those in which the difference between Christ's teaching and the normal teaching of Judaism, as this existed in His day, is set forth. The Jewish Law on the matter of loving one's neighbour is contained, as we have seen, in Lev. xix. 18; but it must be read in its context to see its real meaning: "Thou shalt not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." From this it is quite clear that by "neighbour" is meant



“one of the children of thy people,” *i.e.* an Israelite; so that the Law did not command that this love should be extended to non-Israelites. But Christ teaches in this parable that “neighbour” must include not only a non-Israelite, but one who, for reasons into which we cannot go now, was regarded with deep contempt, and who in the eyes of the Jews, was worse than an ordinary Gentile. So that our Lord’s teaching here went far beyond the requirements of the Jewish Law; He was inculcating something which was new, something of which the Jewish Scriptures, in accordance with the Law, knew nothing. Montefiore, one of the most unbiased of Jewish scholars in discussing Christian teaching, says this parable “is one of the simplest and noblest among the noble gallery of parables in the Synoptic Gospels. Love, it tells us, must know no limits of race and ask no inquiry. Who needs me is my neighbour. Whom at the given time and place I can help with my active love, he is my neighbour, and I am his. If the grudging Jewish critic should still seek to argue that even this parable, though ‘true,’ is not, as regards the Old Testament, ‘new,’ he must surely admit that the exact parallels to it in that book are very few. Nor can he deny that nowhere in the Old Testament parallels is the doctrine so exquisitely and dramatically taught. No sensible and impartial person would wish to deny the excellence of such commands as Exod. xxii. 21, xxiii. 4, but why should we not also gladly welcome and use a parable which can appeal with such power to the heart and imagination of young and old as the parable of the good Samaritan?”<sup>1</sup> These words witness to an admirable spirit, and what is said about Old Testament parables is true, except that “exact parallels” being “very few” is more than doubtful; there are, in truth, none. Neither in the Law, nor in the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures, is it recognized or taught that the love of one’s neighbour should be extended to those outside the nation of Israel. And the same must be said of the books of the Apocrypha

But cf.  
Lev. 19.34

<sup>1</sup> *The Synoptic Gospels*, ii. 937.

and the post-Biblical body of literature known as the Pseudepigrapha.<sup>1</sup> What our Lord taught in the parable of the Good Samaritan was new and original. It is sometimes asserted that Rabbinical teachers of both the first century and later uttered precepts which inculcate a duty to one's neighbour similar to that taught in this parable. On this subject Montefiore has a great deal to say which is of much interest; he is extremely fair and open in dealing with both sides of the question, and his numerous quotations from Rabbinical literature enable one to form a just estimate of the matter. His own conclusion he expresses thus: "The truth is that the Rabbis are not entirely of one mind on the matter of loving or hating the non-Jew. It would be unjust to sum up the matter by saying that the Rabbis generally taught that it is right or permissible to hate the Gentile. On the other hand, it would hardly be less unfair to say that the Rabbis taught that the love which was to be shown to the Jewish 'neighbour' was to be extended equally to all men, whatever their race or nationality or creed. One can hardly quote any unequivocal utterance from the Rabbis which goes as far as this."<sup>2</sup> After some further examination of relevant passages he says: "Thus, the evidence would seem to show that the Rabbis could and did, in the abstract, and as a general religious doctrine, teach that one must love, and do good to all the 'creatures,' all the children of men, created by the One God. But directly they thought of men in the concrete, directly men became split up into Jews and heathen, or Jews and 'nations,' their purer religious doctrine was often driven into the background. . . . Nationalist hatreds could get support from the Scripture to any desired extent, and the close relationship of Israel to God, so exquisitely conceived as it was in many ways, and so productive of a vivid consciousness of God's nearness and love, had, as its dark shadow accompanying it, the exclusion of the 'nations' "

<sup>1</sup> See Charles, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. ii. (1913).

<sup>2</sup> *Rabbinic Literature and Gospel Teachings*, p. 68. We may also mention what is one of the best known of Hillel's sayings: "What is hateful to thee, do not do to thy neighbour" (Bab. Talmud, *Shabbath*, 31 a).

from God's care and providence and compassion. 'He is mine; I am His. And inasmuch as He is mine and I am His—Lover and beloved—others are outside the range and glory of that love.' Such would seem to have been the feeling."<sup>1</sup>

Abrahams<sup>2</sup> says: "It is indeed remarkable how many stories are to be found in the Rabbinic sources of conduct very like that of the Good Samaritan"; this is true; nevertheless, on reading these one cannot fail to notice differences; nor are they by any means always strictly analogous. A few illustrations, gathered from different sources, will be instructive. In the Midrash on *Ecclesiastes* (*Midrash Koheleth*) ix. 7 it is said: "Once Abba Taḥna the pious was going to his city late on the eve of the Sabbath with a bundle on his shoulder; he found a man smitten with leprosy lying at the crossways, who cried to him: 'Rabbi, do me a kind act, and take me to the city.' He, thus addressed, said to himself: 'If I lay my bundle down here, how am I to nourish myself and my family? If, on the other hand, I leave this sufferer lying helpless here, I shall be committing a sin.' What did he do? He followed the guidance of his good impulse (*yetzer*) against that of his evil impulse, and first brought the leper into the city, and then fetched his bundle which he had left; then at twilight he entered into the city."<sup>3</sup> This, it must be confessed, is extremely weak in comparison with the parable spoken by our Lord. Abrahams gives two other illustrations: "Bar Qappara, walking by the shore of the lake at Cæsarea, comes to the help of a Roman officer who had lost his all in the wreck of his vessel. The Rabbi gives him two *selas*, takes him home, and then gives him three other *selas*, saying, so great a man can use this larger sum."

"Then there is the incident of Eleazer ben Shammua. He it was, who, in reply to the question, How can man escape the travails precedent to the coming of the Messiah? answered, By study of the Law and by the bestowal of loving-

<sup>1</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 74 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, Second Series, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Wünsche, *Das Midrasch Kohelet* . . . , p. 121 (1880).



kindnesses. Hence, it is not surprising that, though he was a pupil of Aqiba who suffered martyrdom at the hands of Rome, Eleazar ben Shammua included Romans in his wide-embracing benevolence. The Rabbi succours a shipwrecked Roman, clothes the sufferer in his own robe of honour, takes him home, feeds him, and presents him with two hundred denarii, and on his departure accompanies him part of the way. The Roman subsequently has a full opportunity, which he utilizes, to show his gratitude."<sup>1</sup> Interesting as these illustrations are, it will be realized that they can hardly be called analogous. The parable of the Good Samaritan stands on an entirely different plane.

### THE PARABLE OF THE RICH FOOL

[Lk. xii. 16-21]

The circumstances which led up to the utterance of this parable tell of something which is quite unique in the Gospel narrative. A certain man from among the multitude thronging our Lord says to Him: "Master, bid my brother divide the inheritance with me" (verse 13); his action illustrates the way in which anyone, apparently, felt at liberty to address Him; in a similar way, on another occasion, "a certain woman out of the multitude" (Lk. xi. 27) addressed Him. But this request is a very strange one, though of great interest as showing how highly our Lord's authority was recognized among the people. The man who made the request must, however, have had a very inadequate idea of the purpose of Christ's presence among men; we may surmise that he was a new-comer, who realized Christ's influence and authority among the people, but had heard little or nothing of His teaching.

It is pertinent to inquire what the point of the man's request really was, and what his grievance against his brother was. The inheritance which sons received from their father was regulated by the Law; the eldest son had a double portion (Deut. xxi. 17, see further on this below,

<sup>1</sup> *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, Second Series, pp. 39 f. (1924).



pp. 183 f.); the remainder was divided among the other sons. As the context contains a warning against covetousness it would seem that this was a younger son who wanted his elder brother to forgo his right and divide the inheritance equally; but this, according to the Law, a younger son had no right to do, and therefore this man appeals to Christ to persuade the elder brother to give up part of his inheritance; in other words, he wants our Lord to gratify his covetousness.<sup>1</sup> This explains the severe tone of Christ's reply: "Man, who made me a judge or a divider over you?" (cf. Exod. ii. 14 = Acts vii. 27). But our Lord's words are significant also as showing His refusal to deal with mundane matters of this kind; His concern was with things spiritual.

Christ then turns to the multitude, and says: "Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

There is no question here of condemning the wealthy, as such; the warning is against all covetousness, which may be, but is not necessarily, a result of possessing riches, and is certainly not a vice confined to the wealthy. It is likely enough that our Lord was acquainted with Ben-Sira's words:

"He that runneth after gold will not be guiltless, and he that loveth gain will go astray thereby" (Ecclus. xxxi. [xxxiv.] 5; and many of His hearers of the higher social *strata* must also have been acquainted with them. It would not by any means have been the only occasion on which our Lord underlined teaching familiar to His hearers.

The second part of this verse is not easy to translate on account of the rather difficult Greek; the Revised Version renders: "for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth"; that does not quite represent the Greek, hence the marginal rendering: "for not in a man's abundance consisteth his life, from the things which he possesseth," *i.e.* owing to his possessions (ἐκ τῶν

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the appropriate words in Ecclus. xiv. 14: "Upon the portion of a brother trespass not, and let not the portion of a good desire pass thee by."

ὑπαρχόντων αὐτῷ). The meaning is that it does not depend upon the abundance of things that a man possesses as to whether he leads a profitable life; the covetous man acts as though everything depended upon possessing the materials for living, and as though there were no need to trouble himself about the main thing, life itself; cp. verse 23: "For the life (soul) is more than the food, and the body than raiment" (cp. also Ps. xlix. 6-8).

Now follows the parable: "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully." It would perhaps be better to render "land" for "ground"; being a rich man, his land would be extensive, and, as the papyri show, *χώρα* is used of wide tracts of land.<sup>1</sup> In the words which follow: "What shall I do, because I have not where to bestow my fruits?" there is nothing blameworthy; they merely point to the abundance of which he has become possessed through the yield of his land. Similarly, when he says further: "This will I do. I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow my corn and my goods," he was but doing what was right;<sup>2</sup> without such precaution the divine bounty which he enjoyed would have run to waste; the means to dispose of them would take time, and therefore the only thing to do was to ensure that the fruits would be safely housed. It is in what follows (in verse 19) that the evil disposition of the man comes to the fore: "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease; eat, drink, and be merry." "Soul," lit. "life" (*ψυχή*) is used here not in the sense of the inner man, or his spirit, but in reference to his human personality with its needs and desires; the Hebrew *nephesh* ("soul") is often used in this sense, e.g. Prov. xix. 15: "Slothfulness casteth into a deep sleep, and the idle soul (*nephesh*) shall suffer hunger"; in the Septuagint (= verse 12) "soul" is *ψυχή*. Here the utter selfishness of the man reveals itself; there is no thought of others in the midst of his superabundant plenty; having

<sup>1</sup> See Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*. . . , s.v. *χώρα* (1929).

<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it is perhaps not fanciful to see in the fourfold repetition of "my" an indication of the man's egotism.

got his goods once bestowed, he feels that now life is worth living; and it consists of eating, drinking, and being merry; life, if it is worth the name, is, according to him, indissolubly connected with enjoyment. Very appropriate here again are the words of Ben-Sira in speaking of this type of man, who says: "I have found rest, and now will I eat of my goods"; he knoweth not what the day will bring forth, he leaveth (his goods) to another" (Ecclus. xi. 19). This hedonistic view of life is that of the writer of Ecclesiastes: "Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be merry" (viii. 15). We have here selfishness, and self-indulgence; but where does the covetousness come in of which the people were warned, and which the parable is meant to illustrate? Selfishness and self-indulgence are the roots from which covetousness grows; the wish to keep everything for oneself inevitably results in grudging others what they have, and that is closely akin to envy; and envy and covetousness are inseparable. Self-indulgence is but an aggravated form of selfishness; the gratification of the senses increases in its demands, whereby not only does the thought of others go by the board, but the goods of others are coveted. Thus does one vice beget another. In the parable itself the actual vice of covetousness is not imputed to the rich man in so many words because it is more heart-searching to set forth its characteristics. Implications will often force applications in the hearts of listeners.

Then the parable concludes: "But God said unto him, Thou foolish one, this night is thy soul required of thee; and the things which thou hast prepared, whose shall they be?" It is not said by what means these words are conveyed, and naturally not; it is a dramatic way of expressing the divine will; in modern speech: "Man proposes, God disposes." The putting of words into the mouth of the Almighty is very common in Rabbinical parables.

The rich man's abundance was to have been the means of life in the fullness of material enjoyment; but now that life itself was to be taken from him; he had intended that his abundance should assure him of life; but he had not



reckoned on the possibility of his life, any more than of his abundance, being taken from him. Therein lay his foolishness. "This night is thy soul required of thee"; soul is here used in a different sense from that in the preceding verse. The Greek is: "they will demand thy soul of thee"; either this is an impersonal use of the finite verb, in a passive sense ("shall be demanded of thee"), or, conceivably, the reference is to the angels who come to fetch away the soul of a man at death, a belief frequently expressed in Rabbinical literature. The parable is eloquently silent on the subject of whither the soul goes; that would have detracted the thought of the listeners too much from the main teaching of the parable; moreover, it is characteristic of our Lord's parables,—and the same applies to Jewish parables as a whole—that they concentrate on one particular subject. The after-life is spoken of in the parable of Dives and Lazarus (p. 203).

The teaching and warning of the parable are summed up in the words: "So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God." The antithesis here is between "himself" and "God." Laying up treasure for himself is selfish and self-indulgent; not being rich toward God is covetousness because he covets for himself that which constitutes God's "riches," help to and sympathy for others. This man was foolish, for his conception of happiness, like his purpose of life, was vain; both were based on wrong principles. Fichte's words might well pass as a comment on this parable: "Nicht Glückseligkeit ist der Zweck unsers Daseins, sondern Glückwürdigkeit."<sup>1</sup>

It has been said that there is nothing specifically Christian about this parable, and that one of the wise men of Israel might equally well have uttered it;<sup>2</sup> this is perfectly true, and only illustrates the fact that our Lord recognized and emphasized all that was good in the teaching of the religious leaders (see *e.g.* Matth. ix. 13, xxii. 37-40). The particular

<sup>1</sup> "Not to attain happiness, but to be worthy of it, is the purpose of our existence."

<sup>2</sup> Cp. Bab. Talmud, *Sota*, 9 *a*, quoted in the *Jewish Encycl.* iv. 322 *b*.



teaching of this parable occurs often in Jewish literature; in the *Test. of the xii. Patriarchs*, Judah xix. 1, 2, *e.g.*, it is said: "My children, the love of money leadeth to idolatry; because when led astray through money, men name as gods those who are not gods, and it causeth him who hath it to fall into madness. For the sake of money I lost my children, and had not my repentance, and my humiliation, and the prayers of my father, been accepted, I should have died childless." To show that covetousness brings its own ruin it is said: "He who looks enviously on that which does not belong to him, not only fails to obtain that which he seeks, but also loses that which he has."<sup>1</sup> Quotations of similar import could be easily multiplied; but they never bring home the lesson with such force as is contained in the Gospel parable.

<sup>1</sup> Bab. Talmud, *Soṭa*, 9 a, quoted in the *Jewish Encycl.* iv. 322 b.

## LECTURE X

### THE PARABLES OF THE LOST SHEEP, THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY, AND THE PRODIGAL SON

[Lk. xv. 1-7 (cp. Matth. xviii. 12, 13), xv. 8-10, xv. 11-32]

IN Lk. xv we have, as in Matth. xxv, a trilogy of parables; they deal, respectively, with the same leading theme; in those before us it is the finding of that which was lost, set forth from different points of view.

By some commentators it is contended that the first two of these parables are not here in their original position; this seems to be implied by Streeter when he says that "in all our sources we find the phenomenon of twin-parables illustrating different aspects of the same idea," among which he mentions Lk. xv. 3-10.<sup>1</sup> Then, again, it is true that the first of our three parables, the Lost Sheep, occurs also in Matth. xviii. 12-14 in a different connexion, while the other two are peculiar to Luke; and it can be argued with force that the third evangelist, seeing how well that parable fitted in with the teaching of the other two, took it from one of his sources and placed it in its present position; but on this see below. Luke, as Dibelius truly says, both in form and material, "constantly reached out towards literature as such; in Acts he is independent; in the Gospel he keeps within the boundaries of a tradition which has already been developed."<sup>2</sup> But is it not possible that the developed tradition did in some cases retain the order of utterances as spoken by our Lord Himself? The setting forth of several parables consecutively was a frequent Rabbinical practice (cp. also Matth. xiii. 24 ff.). In any case, the whole subject of how the material of tradition was put together is too complicated and uncertain to justify

<sup>1</sup> *The Four Gospels: A Study in Origins*, p. 190 (1924).

<sup>2</sup> *From Tradition to Gospel*, p. 161 (1934).

dogmatic assertion. Rightly or wrongly, we find it difficult to believe that these three parables, which belong so closely together, did not originally form a single chain.

Profoundly significant was the event which called forth these parables. In Lk. xv. 1, 2 it is said: "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him for to hear him. And both the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them." A hypercritical inquirer might ask, How came it that Pharisees and scribes appeared together on the same scene with publicans and sinners?<sup>1</sup> The answer is simple: they did not appear upon the same scene; the last thing that Pharisees and scribes would do would have been to recline at meat with publicans and sinners, who were ranked in the same category with Gentiles; clearly, they had seen these undesirable people entering the house for a meal with our Lord, and approached Him later with their murmuring.<sup>2</sup>

Nothing is more characteristic of our Lord's attitude towards men than this solicitude for the erring which attracted the publicans and sinners to His presence (ἡσαν ἐγγίζοντες). The striking contrast to this on the part of the Pharisees as a body—that there were exceptions we have seen<sup>3</sup>—marks a fundamental difference between Christ's teaching and the official Judaism of His day. What is said in Jn. vii. 49 further illustrates this truth: "This multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed"; the words show the contempt in which the masses were held by a certain type of Pharisee. At the same time, however, it is only fair to recognize the Pharisaic point of view in this matter: the publicans, *i.e.* the local Jewish tax-gatherers employed by the Roman procurator, were not unnaturally looked upon with dislike and contempt, both because they were regarded as renegades for taking service under the

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Montefiore, *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 983 f.

<sup>2</sup> In Mk. ii. 15, 16, it certainly looks as though the scribes and Pharisees were actually present at the meal, for they address the disciples who were sitting down with the publicans and sinners. But this apparent error is simply due to compression of the narrative; what the scribes and Pharisees said to the disciples took place afterwards.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 43.

hated Romans, and also because the money taken from the Jews by them went to the support of their oppressors; moreover, their necessarily frequent intercourse with Gentiles would degrade them in the eyes of their fellow-Jews.<sup>1</sup> By the "sinners" are to be understood primarily those who were careless in observing the precepts of the Law, or who ignored it altogether; but undoubtedly those guilty of moral laxity would also be included (see Lk. vii. 39). That publicans and sinners would, therefore, be abhorrent to the highly respectable Pharisees and scribes is very comprehensible,—and in honesty it must be acknowledged that their attitude in this respect is not confined to any one race, nor to any one age. But our Lord received them, and associated with them; and that was a thing unheard of; to hate the sin, while loving the sinner, was something new; and it cannot occasion surprise to read that the Pharisees and scribes murmured; they could not understand it. The very fact that three parables were uttered—and it would be the same if they were not uttered consecutively at one and the same time—all emphasizing the same new teaching, shows that our Lord fully understood the perplexity of the law-abiding, highly moral, religious leaders, and that He did all He could to appeal to what was best in them and to induce them to accept His teaching.

We turn now to consider some of the details of these three parables.

### THE PARABLE OF THE LOST SHEEP

[Lk. xv. 3-7; Matth. xviii. 12, 13]

The suggestion of some commentators that this parable stood originally after that of the Lost Piece of Money is attractive, for it would make the gradation of the three parables in the series rhetorically more striking: first, the loss and finding again of an inanimate coin; then, that of a sentient animal; and, lastly, that of a human being;

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, a saying of Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus (second half of the first century A.D.) runs: "None of the Gentiles has any share in the world to come" (Mishna, *Sanhedrin*, Tosephta xiii. 2); a more charitable view is, however, expressed by other Rabbis.



thus showing how from the least to the greatest nothing shall be lost. Or, again, the gradation might be set forth in this way: the coin does not know it is lost; the sheep does know it is lost, but knows not the way home; the son, too, knows that he is lost, but he does know the way home. Strongly as this logical sequence appeals to the Western mind, it must be confessed that, so far as the textual evidence is concerned, there is not the slightest justification for the suggestion. Moreover, niceties of this kind are foreign to Oriental modes of thought and expression. The central thought of finding that which is lost is of itself too important to require rhetorical embellishment, or logical symmetry.

This parable is given, with some variations, in Matth. xviii. 12, 13; but it is there used in a different connexion; it is told in order to show God's love and care for little children: "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish" (verse 14); but in Luke the same parable has for its purpose to declare the truth that God rejoices over a repentant sinner ("... there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth...")<sup>1</sup> The question is often raised as to which of the two evangelists was indebted to the other here, or as to which was the original purpose and form of the parable; both questions are, we think, beside the mark. It is simply that we have here another instance of a parabolic theme being used for more than one purpose.<sup>2</sup>

The first thing that must strike us about this parable, and it applies to the other two as well, is its realism. The events pictured in the first two, as occurring respectively in the pastoral life and in the home, were things of everyday experience, and therefore familiar to the listeners; how easily a sheep of the flock could stray and be lost, and how obvious that the owner should seek it until he finds it; and similarly with the lost piece of money. But it is just that obviousness which is so significant and unexpected when applied in the spiritual sphere. That it should be

<sup>1</sup> Dodd thinks that the moral, given, as he holds, by each of the two evangelists, is "possibly" not original; with this we are unable to agree.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 10.

just as natural for the Heavenly Father to seek an erring soul as for a shepherd to seek his lost sheep was, at any rate, a new way of putting a wondrous truth.<sup>1</sup> It was a teaching on the divine solicitude for the individual which must have touched the hearts even of the murmuring Pharisees and scribes.

The parable begins with a question which makes the hearers apply to themselves what follows: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, and having lost one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?"

This question-form at the beginning of a parable occurs not infrequently in Rabbinical parables; it is put in such a way that an answer is not expected, but it is a more direct mode of address to the individual than that of beginning with a statement of fact. The question in this case suggests that among the assembled crowd may have been some of the small Galilæan landholders who possessed a moderate flock of sheep, to whom the loss of even one would be of consequence;<sup>2</sup> not only so, but everyone realizes how the loss of one thing, out of many, always enhances its value, for the time being. Doubtless such a small peasant-proprietor would have one or two men-servants in his employ, but he does not send one of these in search of the lost sheep; in his care for his sheep and anxiety about the lost one he is impelled to go *himself* and seek it. There is more in this, as we should expect, than appears upon the surface; the lost sheep, as the sequel shows, represents the repentant sinner; "the honour paid to repentance, the desire shown by God that man should repent, God's willingness to receive the penitent, are all characteristic features of the Rabbinical religion"; but, Montefiore continues, "what is new and striking in the teaching of Jesus is that this process of repentance takes an *active* turn. Man is bidden not merely to receive the penitent gladly, but to *seek out*

<sup>1</sup> See the beautiful passage in Ezek. xxxiv. 11-16, which tells of God's mercy, the shepherd who seeks out his sheep; but it does not deal with the subject of the repentant sinner.

<sup>2</sup> For the size of the flocks of a large landowner, see 1 Sam. xxv. 2; Job. i. 3, xlii. 12,

the sinner, to try to redeem him, and *make* him penitent.”<sup>1</sup> The divine mercy, presented pictorially in the parable, is the pattern which man must follow.

The hypercritical inquirer will ask: What about the ninety-nine left in the wilderness with nobody to look after them? Might not one of them go astray in the meantime? That is the kind of question suggested by the Western mind; but it is, in truth, irrelevant; an Oriental parabolist keeps the central point of his teaching in the forefront, and does not concern himself about the smaller details of the subsidiary parts of his parable. So it is here; the central point is the seeking of the lost sheep, the rest of the flock are not just now in question.

“And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing.” This expresses the affection felt for the lost sheep; the thought is reminiscent of Isa. xlix. 22, which tells of the exiles being brought home: “. . . and they shall bring thy sons in their bosom, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders”; this, however, is said in reference to the nations, but the thought is the same.

“And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and his neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.” The beautiful truth is that the fullness of joy can be experienced only when shared with others. Added to the parable are the words: “I say unto you, that even so there shall be joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine righteous persons, which need no repentance.” The thought inevitably arises here: Can there be any “righteous persons which need no repentance?” On another occasion, when similarly the Pharisees and scribes murmured because the disciples—and doubtless our Lord too—had eaten with publicans and sinners, Christ says to them: “They that are whole have no need of a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Lk. v. 31, 32). Was our Lord speaking ironically in referring to the Pharisees and scribes as righteous, and as needing no

<sup>1</sup> *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 679.



repentance? It is difficult to believe that, for it is not our Lord's way to speak in irony. It seems more likely that He recognized in these Pharisees and scribes, who murmured, truly good and conscientious men, according to their lights; they did not mean to be uncharitable, they were championing, as they believed, true religion, and therefore the cause of God; and as such they were righteous men. We feel the justice of Loisy's words in writing on this verse, when he says: "The righteous who are spoken of are the true servants of God; it is not the purpose of the parable to inquire who they are; but, apart from all theological considerations, it cannot be maintained that the existence of these righteous is purely hypothetical, or that Jesus would not have spoken of the truly righteous, and would have mocked at those who were righteous according to the Law, because these latter, without suspecting it, stood in need of conversion. The righteous must be as real as the sinners. When Jesus uttered this parable, it was not His intention to formulate a theory of salvation, nor to maintain that adherence to His Person was an indispensable condition of righteousness; He allows that many of His hearers, Jews, strict and of rigid morality, might be at peace with God; what He insists upon is that sinners converted by His ministry bring about in Heaven a happiness analogous to that of a shepherd finding his lost sheep."<sup>1</sup>

That our Lord recognized the existence among His hearers of righteous men is clear from, *e.g.*, Matth. v. 45: ". . . for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sendeth rain on the just and the unjust," and xiii. 17: "For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see. . . ."

It is true that in the case before us the Pharisees and scribes were lacking in the desire to gain sinners; but who among the best of men is without fault? He may, in spite of that, be righteous.

This parable teaches, then, that if it is a natural thing for a shepherd to seek his lost sheep, much more natural is it that our Lord should seek lost men; the Pharisees

<sup>1</sup> *Les Évangiles Synoptiques*, ii. 140 f. (1908).



and scribes ought not to murmur at this; it is just the lost ones who need seeking. And when a lost one is found the joy felt by good men is a faint reflex of that experienced by the Heavenly Father and His holy angels.

There is a Jewish parable which in form reminds one of this parable, and it is possible that we have here another parabolic theme; if so, it is deeply interesting to see how our Lord utilized it for His more spiritual teaching. We are again indebted to Montefiore for this Jewish parable;<sup>1</sup> it occurs in the Midrash on Exodus (*Shemoth Rabba*) iii. 1: "While Moses was feeding the sheep of his father-in-law in the wilderness, a young kid ran away; Moses followed it until it reached a ravine, where it found a well to drink from. When Moses got up to it, he said, I did not know that you ran away because you were thirsty. Now you must be weary. He took the kid on his shoulders and carried it back. Then God said, Because you have shown pity in leading back one of a flock belonging to a man, you shall lead *my* flock, Israel."

#### THE PARABLE OF THE LOST PIECE OF MONEY

[Lk. xv. 8-10]

As the teaching of this parable is precisely that of the preceding one, we need do no more than point to one or two details. We have here again the question at the beginning, with the object of riveting the attention of the listeners. How truly the parable reflects the conditions of life in Palestine among the humble folk in those days is very interesting. It is the house of a woman of very moderate means; the drachma was worth only about eightpence, so that the joy of finding a coin of such small value shows how much it meant to a poor woman. She lights a lamp to find the lost coin, not because it is night-time, but because the "window" of a small house in Palestine gave very little light; the aperture was low down in the wall looking on to the street; it had to be small otherwise there would have been the danger of a thief getting in; its smallness also

<sup>1</sup> *Rabbinic Literature* . . . , p. 259.

mitigated the inconvenience which might be caused by wind and rain; anything in the shape of glass or the like was out of the question in the houses of the poor, though something of the kind did exist in the larger houses.<sup>1</sup> The smallness of the aperture would prevent the light penetrating into the corners of the room where the coin would be most likely to have rolled. The woman also sweeps the house—the broom was made of palm-leaves—not necessarily because of the accumulation of dust, but because by doing so the coin would be the more likely to be set rolling so that its tinkling could be heard; the floor was often simply the rock on which the house was built, or else composed of hardened soil.

The calling together of friends and neighbours to rejoice with the woman on finding her lost piece of money also reflects actual conditions; to Western ears it may sound somewhat exaggerated to make such an ado over a trifling matter; but one must remember the emotionalism and excitability of the Oriental disposition; it takes a very little to arouse the feelings of Eastern peoples; and, when all is said and done, it meant a good deal to a poor woman to feel that her money, however small, was found; she would not have taken so much trouble to seek it if it had not been of real value to her. The neighbourliness of the poor must also be taken into consideration; mutual sympathy in joy, as in sorrow, has always been, and is, characteristic of them.

A parable of the finding of a lost coin occurs also in Rabbinical literature, and again one can observe the great contrast between our Lord's use of a parabolic theme, and the Rabbinical:

Rabbi Pinchas ben Jair (second half of the second century A.D.) said: "If thou seekest after the words of the Law as after treasures, God will not withhold from thee thy reward. It is like a man who lost a *sela*, or some other coin in his house, and he lighted a lamp until he found it. If, then, a man kindles many lights seeking that which affords but an hour's pleasure in this world, until he finds

<sup>1</sup> Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, i. 42 f. (1910).

it, how much rather shouldest thou dig for the words of the Law which assure thee of life in this world and the next, than for treasures.”<sup>1</sup>

We would not for a moment belittle this parable with its insistence on the greater value of spiritual over material treasures; but it will not be denied that our Lord's teaching on the saving of a sinner's soul is of a higher order.

### THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON

[Lk. xv. 11-32]

The close connexion between this parable and what has preceded it is seen by the terse opening: “And he said,” thus joining it on to the other two parables. The essence of the teaching is the same, but it is greatly enhanced by taking as its subject a human being running the gravest danger of being lost in worldly vanities.

The many extraordinary interpretations of both ancient and modern commentators as to who are represented, respectively, by the two sons, are all entirely beside the mark. We have here a very beautiful story, possibly taken from real life, which sets forth a truth of the profoundest moment concerning the relationship between God and man; that should be more than sufficient. The number of the sons, like the hundred sheep or the ten pieces of silver, is wholly unimportant; the essence of the teaching, the central point of the parables, would not have been affected, had there been ten sheep, or five pieces of money, or several sons.

“A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of thy substance that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.” That the younger, not the elder, son is represented as asking for his portion is quite in accordance with the conditions of the time; the younger son in a Jewish family occupied a much less important position than the first-born; according to the Jewish Law the first-born son had the right,

<sup>1</sup> Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Schir Ha-Shirim*, p. 6 (1880).

at his father's death, to a double portion of all that his father possessed, *i.e.* in the case of two sons, to two-thirds; "for," it is explained, "he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the first-born is his" (Deut. xxi. 17). As a younger son's prospects were thus much smaller, it was natural enough that he should desire to go out into the world and do the best for himself, and thus become independent. It was only a younger son who could expect to receive this during his father's lifetime, and the father's consent was purely of goodwill, there was no law to force him to do it. The first-born, on the other hand, could obviously not make such a request, especially in such a case as that before us, in which the father is a landed proprietor. As to the nature of the one-third which fell to the younger son, it could not be part of the landed property, because a subdivision of that kind would in course of time reduce the status of the first-born to humble proportions. Flocks might form part of the portion, but the younger son in our parable clearly had no use for them. The form which his portion took, therefore, was money and clothes.

It is to be noted that it is said: "And he divided unto them his living"; that seems to contradict what has just been said about the first-born not being in a position to ask for his portion during his father's lifetime; and, in truth, what is said in the parable here is unprecedented, like so much else that our Lord taught. The trait is intended to illustrate the lovingkindness of the father to both his sons; to the younger he gives what he asks; to the elder he gives without being asked; for his relationship to his more loyal son is such that he regards all that he has as their joint property: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that is mine is thine" (verse 31).

"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country; and there he wasted his substance with riotous living." He has his will, and is free; but liberty degenerates into licence; and in consequence, the light paternal yoke of the home is exchanged for the yoke of poverty, hunger, and degradation in a strange land. It is a story common to every age;



and it would not be an undue stretch of imagination to picture among those hoary-headed Pharisees and scribes, who listened to our Lord's words, one or another to whom they appealed personally with painful interest.

When in the lowest depths of humiliation and despair, the poor outcast "comes to himself," and says: "How many hired servants of my father's house have bread enough and to spare, and I perish here with hunger!" Degradation and hunger, and behind these a nobler impulse, induce him to long that he may be made one of his father's hired servants.

Here a short digression may be permitted in order to realize the significance of "hired servants." In those days, on a Jewish estate, such as is pictured in the parable, there were three grades of workmen: first, the "bondmen" (*δοῦλοι*); one might be tempted to regard these with pity because they formed, as it were, part and parcel of the estate, and, in theory at all events, enjoyed no rights; but, whatever may have been the lot of bondmen among the Romans, their position under the Jewish *régime* was by no means hard; and it is with Jewish conditions that we are here concerned. Among the Jews the bondservant was in a real sense regarded as belonging to the outer ring of his master's family; the Law enumerates the duties which a master owes to his slave (*e.g.* Exod. xxi. 2-6; Lev. xxv. 39-47; Deut. xv. 12-18; etc.). A Jewish slave had an interest in his master's affairs, if for no other reason, because he himself was affected by the prosperity or otherwise of his master's business. But quite apart from that, owing to the enactments of the Jewish Law and the tradition of centuries, the relations between a Jewish master and his bondservants was, generally speaking, more than merely tolerable.<sup>1</sup> There was a second order of bondservants, slaves of a lower class (*παῖδες*). They were the subordinates of the preceding; this is well illustrated in Lk. xii. 45: "But if that servant

<sup>1</sup> See, further below, p. 194. A slave of a higher order, who does not, however, come into consideration here, was the "household servant" (*οἰκέτης*, Latin *famulus*) mentioned in Lk. xvi. 13; he occupied a more confidential position in the houses of the wealthy.

(δοῦλος) shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants (τοὺς παῖδας) and maidservants (τὰς παιδίσκας) . . ."; from this it is clear that the δοῦλος, or bondservant, occupied a position of superiority over the παῖς (slave of a lower order). Then, lastly, there were the "hired servants" (μίσθιοι). The "hired servant" was an outsider, he did not belong to the estate, he had no personal interests in the affairs of his temporary master; he was merely a casual labourer to be employed when required; and having received his pay he could be dismissed without notice; beyond his day's wages he had no claim, moral or otherwise, on his employer. His position was, therefore, precarious,<sup>1</sup> and his status was inferior to both the other kinds of servants, though, unlike them, he was a free man; he was regarded as occupying the lowest rank among labourers.

It is as one of this last type of labourer, then, that the younger son determines to return home; even that, he feels, would be preferable to his present hopeless position: "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." "Heaven" here, as often in Rabbinical writings, stands for God. The words express confession of sin, and repentance. In the Rabbinical literature Confession (*Widdui*) and Repentance (*Teshubah*, "turning") occupy a prominent position; a few illustrations of this may be given, illustrating, as they do, traditional teaching. An ancient form of individual confession runs: ". . . Dust am I in my life; how much more in my death. Behold, I am before thee like a vessel filled with shame and confusion. O may it be thy will, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, that I may sin no more, and as to the sins I have committed, purge them away in thine abounding compassion, though not by means of affliction and sore

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Matth. xx. 1 ff., where the synonymous term ἐργάτης, "labourer," is used ("why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired (ἐμισθώσατο) us.")

diseases.”<sup>1</sup> A well-known saying from the Midrash *Shir-ha-Shirim* on v. 2, already quoted, is: “God spake to the Israelites, ‘Open for me a gateway of repentance as big as a needle’s eye, and I will open for you gates wide enough for chariots and horses.’” In another Midrash, *Shemoth rabba*, on xii. 4, it is said: “God says, ‘My hands are stretched out towards the penitent; I thrust no one back who gives me his heart in repentance.’” And, once more, in the Babylonian Talmud, *Pesachim*, 119a, this saying occurs: “God’s hand is stretched out under the wings of the heavenly chariot to snatch the penitent from the grasp of justice.”<sup>2</sup> This teaching must have been familiar to many of our Lord’s hearers, especially to the Pharisees and scribes, to whom His words must have come home with great force.

The parable continues: “And he arose, and came to his father. But while he was yet afar off, his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.”

Wholly unnecessary is the supposition of some commentators that the father had daily been on the look-out for the return of his son; there is nothing in the wording of the parable to support this. Of course the father would long to see his son again; but there is nothing in the parable to show that the son’s return was expected; nor could the father have known the kind of life his son had led; his greeting is given before the son has been able to say anything; the father’s compassion must be explained by the sight of his son’s forlorn condition. It is only after the loving greeting that the son makes his confession. But the knowledge of the son’s sinfulness makes no difference to the father’s welcome, because he sees his son’s repentant sorrow. He says to his servants: “Bring forth quickly the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring the fatted calf, and kill it, and let us

<sup>1</sup> *Berakoth* 17, quoted by Abrahams, *Studies* . . ., First Series, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> A large number of further illustrations will be found in Montefiore’s article, “Rabbinic Conceptions of Repentance,” in the *Jewish Quarterly Review*, xvi. pp. 209-257 (1904).



eat and make merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

We note here, first, that the "servants" are those of the first category mentioned above, the "bondmen" (δοῦλοι), those who were most closely attached to the family; their closer relationship to their master would make them the appropriate ones to bring forth robe, ring, and shoes (sandals) for the returned son; only confidential servants would do this. The younger son is treated as an honoured guest; the "fatted calf," reserved for special occasions (cf. Matth. xxii. 4), is killed; and the general merriment is a beautiful human touch which does not require the far-fetched interpretations foisted upon it by ancient and modern commentators.

With the words, "he was lost and is found" the central purpose and teaching of the parable are concluded. Before we proceed, a Jewish parable is worth quoting; its theme, that of a degenerate son, is the same as in our parable; that is the reason for quoting it; otherwise the two parables are not comparable. It is interesting to note how very differently the theme is treated in the two parables. This parable tells of "a king's son who had fallen into evil courses; the king sent his instructor to him with the message, 'Come to thyself, my son.' But the son sent back answer to his father: 'With what face can I return, I am ashamed to come into thy presence.' Thereupon his father sent him word: 'My son, should a son be ashamed to return to his father? If thou returnest, will it not be to thy father that thou comest?'" Rabbi Meir, a disciple of Akiba, who lived in the first half of the second century A.D., uttered this parable in illustration of God's mercy; he continues: "In the same way, God sent Jeremiah to the Israelites when they had sinned. He said to him: 'Go and say unto my children, Come to yourselves!' Where is this shown? In Jer. iii. 12, *Go, and proclaim these words toward the north, and say, Return, thou backsliding Israel . . .* the Israelites answered Jeremiah, 'With what face can we return unto God?' Where is this shown? In verse 25, where it says, *Let us lie*



down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us; for we have sinned against the Lord our God . . .’ Then God sent word to them: ‘My children, If ye return, will it not be to your father that ye return?’ Where is this shown? In Jer. xxxi. 9, *I am a father to Israel.*”<sup>1</sup> There is distinct beauty in this parable, though it is of a different order from that under consideration.

The latter part of our parable begins with: “And they began to be merry”; the words are an introduction to that part of the parable which deals with a subsidiary, but very necessary, subject. The details of the merry-making have already been made, so that its repetition would be out of place in this second part of the parable.

With the further purpose of teaching His hearers (especially the Pharisees and scribes who had murmured at His intercourse with sinners), that God’s mercy towards men must be the pattern which is to guide men in their dealings with one another, our Lord adds the concluding part of the parable: When the elder brother comes home from the fields—intent on doing his duty, be it observed—he hears the sounds of merry-making, and inquires the meaning of it; having heard from one of the servants the reason of it, “he was angry, and would not go in”; thereupon “his father came out, and entreated<sup>2</sup> him” to enter in and welcome his brother; he refuses, saying: “Lo, these many years do I serve thee, and I have never transgressed a commandment of thine; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends; but when this thy son”—notable is the contemptuous tone and the avoidance of saying, “my brother”—“came, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou killedst for him the fatted calf.”

How entirely justified, at first sight, the elder son’s protest appears! Long service, faithful service, and no reward—on the one hand; ingratitude, unbridled self-indulgence, and a reward—on the other! Judged by the ordinary standards of the world’s point of view, the elder son was absolutely

<sup>1</sup> Wünsche, *Der Midrasch Debarim Rabba* . . ., pp. 32 f. (1882).

<sup>2</sup> For this force of παρακαλεῖν, cp. Acts xvi. 39; 1 Cor. iv. 13.

right. But Christ's point of view was not that of the world, not even that of the religious world of His day. Even to day, after so many centuries of Christianity, there are many, perhaps most, who would maintain that the elder son's grievance was perfectly justified. Let us weigh the matter a little more carefully. "Lo, these many years have I served thee": Is it, then, a matter of servitude to do one's duty? And had his father not allowed him the full use of his portion (verse 12)? Moreover, had not the elder son profited by his labour? The claim, "I never transgressed a commandment of thine," was not one of which, according to the teaching of Christ, he had any reason to boast: "when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants, we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Lk. xvii. 10). The elder son's further words, "thou never gavest me a kid that I might make merry with my friends"—not even a kid, let alone the fatted calf—presents a pose of injured innocence which is a contemptible trait of the self-righteous; he knew well enough that he could make merry if he wished; it was not necessary that his father should have had to remind him that "all that is mine is thine." All this reveals the frame of mind of the self-righteous, characteristic of the dominant type of Pharisee. But worse still is the uncharitable disposition evinced towards the erring, but now repentant, brother; and the flinty heart which failed to be touched by the father's feelings towards his recovered son. The father says: "It was meet to make merry and be glad; for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." What a delicate, yet penetrating rebuke is conveyed by "this thy brother!" The elder son had just deliberately abstained from describing him as his brother. It was nothing to him that his brother was sorry for what he had done, and was willing to make amends, and become a better man. Christ had said: "Even so, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (xv. 10); but here is one who seems positively annoyed at a brother's repentance; like the Pharisees who murmured because Christ received sinners.

This second part of the parable belongs indissolubly to the first part; the soul-stirring love which Christ shows for the repentant sinner overflows in its longing to gain also the self-righteous one who in his blindness and uncharitableness fails to see that his state is that of an unrepentant sinner.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In Dodd's view, the point of this parable "would seem to lie in the contrast between the delight of a father at the return of his scapegrace son, and the churlish attitude of the 'respectable' elder brother" (*op. cit.*, p. 120). As a subsidiary purpose of the parable it cannot be doubted that this is true; but its *central* point, we cannot but feel, is something more inspiring.

## LECTURE XI

### THE PARABLES OF THE UNRIGHTEOUS STEWARD, AND OF DIVES AND LAZARUS

[Lk. xvi. 1-13; Lk. xvi. 19-31]

THE parable of the Unrighteous Steward follows immediately upon that of the Prodigal Son without, apparently, any special event or utterance to prompt it, as is the case with so many of the parables, and unlike the three preceding parables, which were called forth by the murmuring of the Pharisees and scribes: "This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them" (Lk. xv. 2). It is addressed specifically to the disciples (xvi. 1), though the Pharisees, who were listening, took it, no doubt rightly, as applying to themselves (xvi. 14).

One of the chief points upon which the interpretation of this difficult parable turns is the relationship between the "certain rich man" and his steward. Here it is of prime importance to decide whether this relationship is to be thought of as being under the Roman or the Jewish *régime*. Some modern commentators hold that it is the former, and point out that the steward, in bidding his employer's debtors strike off some of what was owing, was not wronging him, but was denying himself something that was his by right in order to gain the goodwill of the debtors and thus secure himself against the time of difficulty facing him. If this interpretation were correct, the parable would undoubtedly be shorn of some of its difficulties, and it is presumably for this reason that it has been put forward; but, as will be seen, this interpretation will not stand.

That the whole *mise en scène* of the parable is not Roman, but Jewish, is probable on *à priori* grounds; for it must be allowed that, on the face of it, one would expect that our Lord would have in view a Jewish owner with a Jewish



steward. He was, as man, Himself a Jew, living in the country of the Jews, deeply versed in Jewish writings, having the fullest knowledge of Jewish customs and conditions of life; He was speaking in the Jewish language, and was addressing Jews. Why should it be supposed in any way likely that He would choose for the scene of His parable a Roman household, the conditions of which were certainly unknown to the great mass of His hearers, when, moreover, He was well aware of the hatred of His countrymen towards everything Roman? There is nothing in the parable itself that suggests this. That, on the contrary, the parable, together with the comments which follow it, is impregnated with Jewish thought and expression will, it is hoped, become clear as we proceed.

The Hebrew equivalent for *οἰκονόμος*, "steward," is (*Sokēn*) and the meaning of this word ("one who is over the house") is well illustrated, *e.g.*, in Isa. xxii. 15: "Go, get thee unto this treasurer (R.V. marg. 'steward,' Hebr. *Sokēn*), even unto Shebna, who is over the house" (cp. also Gen. xliii. 19, xliv. 4); the same office is entrusted to Eliezer (Gen. xxiv. 2), and to Joseph (Gen. xxxix. 4); the idea in each case being that a steward had charge of all that belonged to his master, and that he was placed "over the house." In the New Testament precisely the same meaning attaches to the word; *οἰκονόμος*, as the word implies, always has reference to household matters, viz. 1 Cor. iv. 1, 2, where St. Paul has been speaking of building upon the foundation of Christ; it is, therefore, a question of a steward in the house of God; again, in Tit. i. 7, where the bishop, or "overseer," is spoken of as the steward of God's house; so also in 1 Tim. iii. 5: "But if a man knoweth not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?" though here the actual word *οἰκονόμος* does not occur (see also 1 Pet. iv. 10). In Roman households the steward (*villicus*) was always a slave;<sup>1</sup> similarly in Jewish households he would almost invariably be a slave;<sup>2</sup> see Lk. xii. 42, 43, where the steward is spoken of as a slave.

<sup>1</sup> See H. A. Wallon, *Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquité*, ii. 214 ff. (1879).

<sup>2</sup> Nowack, *Hebräische Archäologie*, i. 177 (1894).

Now if, in the parable, a Roman household had been presented, dismissal would not have been the steward's punishment for his wrong-doing. Roman masters had absolute control over the lives and persons of all their slaves,<sup>1</sup> and the punishment which a Roman master would inflict on his slave for the offence of robbery or the like would be either death, or imprisonment, or torture, or degradation, but certainly not dismissal, which would have meant freedom. The chief aim of the Romans in regard to slaves was to get the utmost use out of them; it is, therefore, reasonably certain that no Roman would dismiss his slave, no matter what the offence. In Jewish households the case was quite different. For an insight into the relationship between master and slave here we may refer, firstly, to the instances of Abraham and Eliezer, and Potiphar and Joseph;<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, to the legislation regarding slaves. Without going into details, a reference to these shows that a slave was almost in the position of one of the family,<sup>3</sup> and that the legislation concerning him was of a most merciful character, utterly different from that of the Romans. It is most true, as has been pointed out by Benzinger,<sup>4</sup> that among the Jews it was preferable, by far, for slaves to continue in the state of slavery, than to become free—and starve; the freed slave was in such danger of starvation that the Jewish law compelled a master to supply his slave “liberally” with the necessities of life when, in the seventh year, he received his freedom (see Deut. xv. 12–14). For a Jewish slave to leave his master's house was like leaving home. Generally speaking, the most cruel punishment that a Jewish master could inflict on his slave was to dismiss him, for it meant that he was cast out into the world, without home, without friends, without occupation, and in grave danger of dying of starvation. The more highly placed the slave, as in the case of the steward in the parable, the more difficult would his position be on his dismissal, and the less his chance of finding employment,

<sup>1</sup> Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer*, pp. 182 ff. (1886).

<sup>2</sup> Though the scene here is Egypt, yet the *conditions* are set forth from the Hebrew point of view.

<sup>3</sup> Nowack, *op. cit.*, i. 173.

<sup>4</sup> *Hebräische Archäologie*, p. 161 (1894), and see above, p. 185.

hence the special force of the words: "What shall I do, seeing that my lord taketh away the stewardship from me? I have not strength to dig, to beg I am ashamed." These words show, moreover, that the steward took for granted that he would be dismissed; had he been the steward of a Roman landowner his thoughts would have run rather in the direction of what sort his punishment was going to be. Thus, we may take it that the relationship existing between the master and the steward was a *Jewish* one; and this marks the Jewish character of the whole section before us.

There are, in the next place, several words and expressions which likewise show the Jewish setting: thus, the two words used for "measure" (*bath* and *kor*) in verses 6 and 7 are Hebrew words for fluid and dry measures respectively;<sup>1</sup> *αἰών*, as used in the sense of "world" (vessel), is the equivalent of the Aramaic *'alma*; *μαμωνᾶς* ("mammon") in verse 9 is an Aramaic word; *τὰ γράμματα* ("bond") in verse 6, used in the sense of *χειρόγραφον*, "a written agreement," represents the Aramaic *shetara*, "note of indebtedness." Then we have a certain number of Hebraisms in the Greek: "the steward of unrighteousness," "the sons of this world," "the sons of light" (verse 8), "the mammon of unrighteousness" (verse 9).

A further important point is the use of parallelisms throughout the section, both in the parable and in the explanatory comments, especially in the latter. These, as is well known, are a characteristic feature in both Hebrew and Jewish literature. In the present case special attention must be drawn to them, for they are so Hebraic in their balanced structure; indeed, there is such a consistent method running through these parallelisms that one feels tempted to believe that in their *outward form* of ordered consistency they illustrate the lesson which, as we shall see, the parable is intended to teach; this would be quite in accordance with the methods of Jewish pædagogics. In order to make quite clear what is meant by the parallelisms (they are most obvious in the comments, as we have said,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Ezek. xlv. 10, 14; *kor* is also used for a fluid measure (Nowack, *op. cit.*, i. 204 f.).

which may not, however, be separated from the parable itself), we may put the matter in this way (the columns must be read downwards first):

- |        |  |   |
|--------|--|---|
| v. 9.  | <i>Making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness</i> | <i>Being received into everlasting tabernacles</i>    |
|        | is being   | is the reward of being                                |
| v. 10. | <i>Faithful in that which is least,</i>                | <i>Faithful in that which is much,</i>                |
|        | that is  | that is   |
| v. 11. | <i>Being faithful with the unrighteous mammon ;</i>    | <i>Being entrusted with the true riches ;</i>         |
|        | this, from the point of view of the sons of light, is  | this, from the point of view of the sons of light, is |
| v. 12. | <i>That which is another's.</i>                        | <i>That which is your (our) own.</i>                  |

The principle running through the whole is that of consistency ; the conclusion drawn is that

*No man can serve two masters (verse 13),  
hence the final dictum,  
He cannot serve God and mammon.*

The balance in the verses, working out in logical consistency, is very striking, and in seeking to understand the meaning of the parable, may be found to be significant.

A few points in the parable itself may be noted before we come to the explanatory comments which, in this case, form the more important part of the section.

The expression in verse 1, “. . . that he was wasting his goods” (*διασκοπίζων . . .*), implies, as Lk. xv. 13 shows, that the steward had spent money extravagantly on self-indulgence ; instead of serving his lord he had served himself. How the lord heard of his steward's malpractices, and wherein they consisted, are not indicated ; that is a thoroughly Jewish trait in parabolic narrative, wherein it is the essential point which is emphasized, the subsidiary details being ignored as unnecessary ; in this case what is of main



importance is that the steward had wasted his master's goods.

Being faced with the prospect of dismissal, the outlook for the steward is black. To seek a similar post would be out of the question, for his dishonesty had become known, as verse 2 shows ("what is this that I hear of thee?"); manual labour was impossible for one who had been employed as he had; the alternative of begging was repugnant to one who had occupied an honourable position. The steward, therefore, determines to do what he had hitherto done; he will, consistently with what he had already done, go on swindling his lord (verses 4-7). He does this in a clever way; by authorizing the debtors to reduce the amounts due on their respective bonds they were legally relieved of paying the full amount. The responsibility was the steward's; the debtors would know that, and would, therefore, feel under an obligation to him, dishonest as his action was; that, however, was his business, not theirs. The steward could thus reckon on a *quid pro quo*; there is honour among thieves. When his lord hears of this, being a worldly-wise man, he commends his steward because he had acted prudently.<sup>1</sup> There the parable ends, in the middle of verse 8.

Taking the parable as it stands, and without reading into it anything allegorical, an interpretation which it is unable to bear, the meaning is perfectly clear. It is to be noted, in the first place, that all the characters are "sons of this world," *i.e.* evil. Thus the steward is dishonest, he does not attempt to deny the accusation brought against him. The lord commends the dishonesty of his steward, and may, therefore, not unreasonably be regarded as belonging to the same category.<sup>2</sup> The debtors partake of the dishonesty of the steward; they not only acquiesce in it, but are also willing to benefit by it.

Noteworthy, in the second place, is the *consistent action* of

<sup>1</sup> Φρονίμως means "prudently" rather than "wisely," and occurs in this sense on the papyri, see Moulton-Milligan, *op. cit.*, *s.v.*

<sup>2</sup> It might be argued that inasmuch as he commends his steward's action the dismissal would be cancelled; but as a worldly-wise man the lord would not run the risk of being swindled again, whatever he thought of his steward's cleverness.

the characters in the parable; this is very important as tending to support what, as we believe, is the true interpretation of the parable. The steward first defrauds his lord by wasting his goods; consistently with this he deliberately and for his own ultimate benefit directs the debtors to deduct a portion from the debts owing to his lord.<sup>1</sup> The rich man is a server of mammon; this is not expressly stated in the parable, but is obviously implied; consistently with this, he commends the methods employed by his steward, they appealed to his worldly instincts. The debtors partake of the dishonesty of the steward; consistently with this, they receive him into their houses when he has lost his means of livelihood; this, again, is not definitely stated in the parable, but it is implied that they were prepared to do so (cp. verses 4 and 9).

This *consistent action* on the part of all the characters in the parable is striking, and seems to be its keynote. This is further borne out by the comments which follow. As these belong indissolubly to the parable, they demand some examination.<sup>2</sup>

They begin with verse 8<sup>b</sup>: "For the sons of this world are for their own generation wiser than the sons of light." Some commentators take these words as being spoken by the lord in the parable; but the contrast between the sons of this world and the sons of light would sound very strange in the mouth of a son of this world; from his point of view no comparison was called for, since in the parable the sons of light do not appear upon the scene at all. Others think that the evangelist added these words; if so, he must have imputed them to our Lord. Taking the text as it stands it is most natural to regard the words as having been spoken by our Lord.

The expression "sons of this world" is a pure Hebraism, as already pointed out; for this use of *αἰών* in a temporal and

<sup>1</sup> Edersheim (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, ii. 267 [1890]) says that though the steward was acting "unrighteously," he could not be charged with "criminality" in remitting part of the debts owing, because he was "strictly within his rights." If, however, as we have shown to be the case, the conditions are Jewish, he would have no rights; a Jewish steward had no perquisites by right.

<sup>2</sup> Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 29-31, takes a different view.

bad sense, cp. Gal. i. 4, "this present evil world," and 2 Cor. iv. 4, "in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving."

The phrase "for their own generation" (Hebrew *bedoram*) means "as regards their contemporaries," cp. Gen. vi. 9. The words may, then, be paraphrased thus. The wicked here on earth are, as regards those among whom they live, wiser than the sons of light. The reason why they are wiser is obvious enough; worldly people act on certain principles, viz. they are here to enjoy themselves and to get the greatest possible amount of pleasure out of life; for this purpose they must have money; this must be obtained, honestly if possible, being wise policy, but dishonestly if need be. This is their guiding principle, and they *consistently* live up to it. But the sons of light also have fixed principles (e.g. Eph. v. 8, 9 . . . "walk as children of light, for the fruit of the light is in all goodness and righteousness and truth"), yet, too often, their conduct is *inconsistent* with their principles. So that, so far as consistent action is concerned—and that is the one point at issue—the sons of this world are wiser than the sons of light. It is not as though our Lord commended this action on the part of the sons of this world, for then it would be justly objected that He was, in effect, saying: *Pecca fortiter*; He is simply recognizing things as they are. The sons of this world *are* wiser than the sons of light in the matter of consistent action. Consistency is a virtue; being exercised in a wrong direction does not make it, *per se*, less a virtue. "Either make the tree good, and its fruit good; or make the tree corrupt, and its fruit corrupt" (Matth. xii. 33), but the tree is a tree in either case.

"And I say unto you" (verse 9): it is these words which, presumably, have led many commentators to suppose that our Lord's comments on the parable begin here; but, as we have seen, the sense forbids this; His comments begin with: "For the sons of this world . . ." We must translate *καὶ* "and," here, "moreover," or "also."

"Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, when it shall fail, they may receive you into eternal tabernacles" (verse 9): these words must



be read as a parallelism with, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in (respect of) the unrighteousness mammon . . ." (verse 11). Making friends of the mammon of unrighteousness is being faithful in that which is least, *i.e.* according to verse 10, "he that is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much"; if, in other words, a man is trustworthy in small things, it is an earnest of what he will be in greater things, and therefore his reward of being received in "eternal tabernacles" is regarded as assured.

As to the words "when it shall fail," whether we accept the reading ἐκλίπη or ἐκλίπητε is of little consequence; the interpretation will not be affected in either case, for whether used impersonally or not, the meaning of ἐκλείπω here will be that of "coming to an end," *i.e.* dying. The main difficulty of the verse centres in "that . . . they may receive you" (ἵνα . . . δέξωνται ὑμᾶς); the grammatical structure would point to the "friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" as the subject; but the sense absolutely forbids this; the friends of mammon would be the last to receive the sons of light into "eternal tabernacles." The words ἵνα δέξωνται ὑμᾶς must clearly be paraphrased; according to Jewish usage two alternatives are offered; it may be rendered, "that ye may be received"; this is a frequent Hebrew usage, and the instance before us is not an isolated one in the New Testament; a perfect parallel to it is found in Lk. xxiii. 31: εἰ ἐν ὕγρῳ ξύλῳ ταῦτα ποιοῦσιν . . .; there is no subject to ποιοῦσιν, so that one can translate correctly: "If these things are done in the green tree . . ." But in Rabbinical literature, in order, for reverential reasons, to avoid the direct mention of God, "they" is often used; so that here it would be quite admissible to regard "God," unexpressed, as the subject of δέξωνται.

Then we have the strange phrase, "into the eternal tabernacles" (εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς), strange because αἰώνιος and σκηνή, would seem, according to common usage, to contain two opposed ideas, eternal and temporary abiding; the phrase is, however, supported by Old Testament usage, *e.g.* in Psalm lxi. 5 (E. v. 4): "I will dwell in thy tabernacle for ever" (rendered in the Septuagint:



παροικήσω ἐν τῷ σκηνώματί σου εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας); moreover, the exact phrase before us is not unknown in later Jewish literature, which doubtless reflects earlier usage.<sup>1</sup> The verse may, then, be paraphrased thus: Be ye faithful with the mammon of unrighteousness, *i.e.* in your dealings with money matters, which is one of the lesser duties, so that when all is over here on earth, ye may be received into abiding dwelling-places. This explanatory comment is immediately followed by the further ones in verses 10-12; these are three links in a chain, and, as already pointed out, they answer to, and balance, one another. They illustrate and emphasize the lesson on *Consistency*, and lead up to the logical conclusion contained in verse 13:

“No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” It is of great interest to notice how the argument rises from what appears quite a wordly standpoint, step by step in logical sequence, to the highest stage, where the final alternative, the gathering together of all that has preceded, is put with startling curtness: “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” It was the glaring inconsistency in the lives of so many of our Lord’s hearers that called forth from Him the whole of the discourse in xvi. 1-13.

From these explanatory comments the deduction seems justified that the lesson taught is that our Lord demands of His followers consistency of life; the ordinary relationship of worldly men to one another is taken as the starting-point for showing that this demand is, in the very nature of things, a just one. The teaching of these explanatory comments must be borne in mind in seeking to understand the purpose of the parable.

It may be objected that this interpretation of the parable makes our Lord hold up the action of the “sons of this world” as the pattern for the “sons of light” to follow. But in that case there are at least two other instances of the teaching of our Lord to which objection would have to be taken. In Lk. xiv. 31, 32 He says: “What king, as he goeth

<sup>1</sup> See the quotation from *The Testament of Abraham* on p. 205.

to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and take counsel whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an embassy, and asketh conditions of peace." Here the action of a worldly man is pointed to as the pattern which our Lord's disciples are to follow, namely, foresight. Again, in Lk. xviii. 1-7 the action of the unrighteous judge is made an illustration of what God Himself does. Here it is the protection of the oppressed, even when prompted by wrong motives, which is, *per se*, right action. What in all such cases is demanded is that we should distinguish between a right principle and the method of its application.

The "sons of this world" are, in truth, far from doing the will of God; but the "sons of light" are, as they themselves would be the first to confess, not in all respects everything that they should be; and if they can learn a good lesson even from those who are not in their following, so much the better for them.

While, however, as we have sought to show, the primary purpose of this parable is to inculcate the need of consistency of life, it is not denied that subsidiary teaching may well be contained in it as well; that is, not infrequently, the case in the parables.

In this parable the consistent dishonesty of action on the part of the steward is due to his want of money; and the evil of the love of money is emphasized in the last of the explanatory comments: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," though it will hardly be denied that the primary meaning of these words is that of the inconsistency of trying to serve God and at the same time to be a mammon-worshipper. But the Pharisees seized on this secondary point in the teaching of the parable, for, as "lovers of money" (verse 14), they would feel that it was directed against them; hence their scoffing. The primary teaching of the parable, though undoubtedly spoken against them, too, would not have come home to them with the same force because, from their point of view, it was inapplicable to them; as strict observers of the Law, they could not have felt that want of

consistency in their lives could be charged against them. They, therefore, passed over that part of the teaching of the parable, while their conscience told them that its warning against the love of money was meant for them. Thus, it is possible that the parable which follows may have its point of attachment with the warning concerning the love of money. To this parable we turn next.

### THE PARABLE OF DIVES AND LAZARUS

[Lk. xvi. 19-31]

It is obvious that no connexion exists between this parable and verses 16-18, which immediately precede it. If, with many commentators, we regard these verses as being out of place, then our parable will follow immediately after verses 14, 15: "And the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all these things; and they scoffed at him. And he said unto them, Ye are they that justify yourselves in the sight of men; but God knoweth your hearts; for that which is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God." It is, we trust, not fanciful to see in these words a reference to the two themes contained in the preceding parable. The secondary theme is mentioned first because this is what had touched the Pharisees to the quick; but the primary theme, consistency of life, is then implicitly referred to; it was the self-righteousness of the Pharisees, engendered by strict observance of the Law, which justified them in the sight of men; but God knew their inconsistency of life. Strict legal observance was held in high respect among the people; but outward conformity with the precepts of men when the heart was insincere and hypocritical was an abomination in the sight of God.

But, as we have said, it was our Lord's words about mammon-worship which had touched the Pharisees to the quick, and which had been the cause of their scoffing at Him; therefore it is to this subject that our Lord returns in the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

The picture of the rich man is realistic: a gorgeous outward appearance, and a pandering to the stomach (" . . .

whose god is the belly," Phil. iii. 19); the expression "faring sumptuously" (*εὐφραινόμενος*) refers especially to the enjoyment of food (see Lk. xii. 19, xv. 23, 24, 29, 32). It is said that he fared thus sumptuously "every day"; the implication here is, for the most part, overlooked by commentators. Our Lord is speaking to Jews, especially to Pharisees, whose knowledge of the Law was unquestioned. Now, a central part of the Law is contained in the Ten Commandments; one of these consists of two parts, each of which was equally binding: "Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all that thou hast to do . . ." The stress laid on the observance of the Sabbath has only too often resulted in the other part of the commandment being overlooked; but "six days shalt thou labour" was a command which every Jew who honoured the Law was bound to observe. How could he who fared sumptuously *every day*, in other words, who kept daily festival, possibly fulfil the command of daily labour? In this, apart from all else, therefore, the rich man was a law-breaker, a sinner.

The "certain beggar" is given the name of Lazarus; this is the only instance in the parables of our Lord in which He gives a name to one of the characters. The name here seems, quite unnecessarily, to have caused commentators some difficulty; some think that the name was inserted by the evangelist; others that a later editor added it. It has also been held that the mention of a name points to the fact that our Lord had some actual person in mind; but that, one would imagine, would have been sufficient reason for the non-mention of the name. That this happens to be the only parable in which a proper name occurs does not seem a valid ground for thinking that our Lord Himself did not use it; after all, we have but a limited number of the many parables which He must have uttered during His ministry, and it is fully possible that, in some of these, names were given to the characters. In the present case there may well have been a special purpose for this name having been chosen; Lazarus is a græcised form of the abbreviated Hebrew form of the name Eleazar, which means "God is (my) help"; in



view of the beggar's ultimate lot in "Abraham's bosom," this name would be highly appropriate.

Very realistic, again, is the picture of the beggar who was laid (the Greek ἐβέβλητο means rather "who was cast down") at the gate—indicating a nobly-built mansion—of the rich man's house; an object of pity calculated to touch the heart of the wealthy sybarite on issuing from his abode. A little misleading is the Revised Version rendering: "desiring to be fed with the *crumbs* that fell from the rich man's table" (verse 21); as Montefiore points out, "what fell from the table were the big bits of bread which were used to clean or dry the hands after the eaters had dipped them,<sup>1</sup> for example, in a dish full of bits of meat and gravy. Napkins were not used for the hands. The guests wiped their hands on bits of bread, and then threw the pieces under the table."<sup>2</sup>

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and that he was carried away by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (verse 22). In this connexion the following passage from *The Testament of Abraham*<sup>3</sup> xx, is worth quoting; the reference is to Abraham: "But the angels escorted his precious soul, and ascended into heaven, singing the hymn of the 'thrice-holy' to the Lord God of all; and they set it to adore the God and Father. And after much praising and glorifying unto the Lord, and when Abraham had adored, there came the pure voice of God and the Father, saying thus: 'Uplift, then, my friend Abraham into Paradise, where are the tabernacles of my righteous ones, and the abodes of my holy ones, Isaac and Jacob, in his bosom, where is no toil, neither grief nor mourning; but peace, and exultation, and life everlasting.'" The Rabbinical belief was similar to this, *e.g.* in *Shabbath* xvii. 2 (Tosephta) it is said that three angels receive the soul of a good man. The expression "Abraham's bosom" occurs in the Bab. Talmud (*Kiddushin*

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Mk. xiv. 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Syn. Gospels*, ii. 1003. It is true that in Matth. xv. 27, Mk. vii. 28 the word ψυχίον "crumb" is used; this = the Neo-Hebrew word *peyror* which is used of crumbs, but it is also used of larger pieces of things (*Jastrow, Talmud Dictionary*, s.v.); ψυχίον is not found in Greek writers (*Moulton-Milligan, op. cit.*, s.v.).

<sup>3</sup> An originally Hebrew book belonging to the first half of the first century A.D.

72 b), where it is said that Rabbi Adda bar Ahaba (third century A.D.) "sits in the bosom of Abraham"; also worth mentioning is 4 Macc. xiii. 17, where one of the martyrs says: "After this our passion, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shall receive us, and all our forefathers shall praise us." We recall also Matth. viii. 11: "Many shall come from the east and the west, and shall recline with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of Heaven."

In both the Apocalyptic and Rabbinical literature differing views are expressed as to the sequence, after death, of Paradise (or Gehenna), the Judgement, and the Resurrection; in the passage before us it would seem that the Resurrection followed immediately after death, as both Dives and Lazarus are spoken of as having bodies.

"And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (verse 23 and cf. Lk. xiii. 28). In place of Hades (= the Hebrew Sheol) we should have expected Gehenna, which elsewhere is spoken of as the place of torment (Matth. v. 22, 29, 30; Mk. ix. 43, and in other passages). Hades, as used in the New Testament (in the passage before us and in Matth. xi. 23; Lk. x. 15; Rev. xx. 13, 14), is a place of torment; in Acts ii. 27, 31; Rev. i. 18, vi. 8, however, it is equivalent to the Old Testament Sheol; and in Matth. xvi. 18 it is somewhat uncertain which meaning is to be attached to it. The fact is that it was only by degrees that the ancient conception of Sheol, as the abode of the shades of the departed, developed into that of a place of punishment of the wicked hereafter.

The close proximity of Hades to "Abraham's bosom" (= Paradise) must strike us as strange; but it reflects an idea which was already current before Christian times; the good and the bad in their respective abodes hereafter are able to see one another, it is part of the punishment of the latter that they should witness the bliss of others which might have been theirs; and the good are represented as exulting over the just retribution of those through whom they had suffered while on earth. This is graphically set forth in the *Book of Enoch*; speaking of the wicked the Seer says:

“Here shall they be gathered together, and here shall be their place of judgement. In the last days there shall be upon them the spectacle of righteous judgement in the presence of the righteous for ever . . .” (xxvii. 2, 3). Again: “For on the day of their anguish and affliction they shall not (be able to) save themselves; and I will give them over into the hands of mine elect; as straw in the fire, so shall they burn before the face of the holy” (xlvi. 8, 9). And once more: “And He will deliver them to the angels for punishment, to execute vengeance on them because they have oppressed His children and His elect. And they shall be a spectacle for the righteous and for His elect; they shall rejoice over them . . .” (lxii. 11, 12, see also lvi. 8). The same idea is found in Rabbinical literature, *e.g.* in the Midrash *Koheleth Rabba* to xiv. 17. On this matter, therefore, the parable reflects the popular beliefs of the times.

“And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.” This verse reflects, again, some popular beliefs; these must be briefly referred to if a proper understanding of the words is to be gained. It must be emphasized that though the Rabbinical literature, as we now have it, belongs to somewhat later ages, it embodies material which goes back for centuries; legends, which passed for true history, were familiar, and were handed down by word of mouth, to become ultimately embodied in Rabbinical writings; similarly with large numbers of sayings of prominent teachers, anecdotes, parables, and the like. Of none of the ancestors of Israel were more acts and words handed down than of Abraham; as the progenitor of the race that is quite comprehensible. In the verse before us there are two matters in connexion with Abraham which demand mention:

There is more significance than appears at first sight in the address by the rich man to Abraham as “Father.” Tradition tells of much discussion from time immemorial as to who among the Jews had the right to consider Abraham as his father, implying, as it did, membership of the chosen people of whom Abraham was the progenitor. One who was cast



out of the synagogue—excommunicated—for example, could not claim Abraham as his father; a proselyte to Judaism could not do so either, he had to say “your,” not “our” Father Abraham; if, however, he had a son by a Jewish wife, in whose veins the blood of Abraham ran, the son could claim Abraham as his father. Any Jew, provided he had some good works to his credit, though a sinner in other respects, might claim Abraham as his father. We recall the Baptist’s protest: “Bring forth, therefore, fruits worthy of repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father . . .” (Matt. iii. 8, 9). In the parable, then, the rich man claims Abraham as his father, he still belongs to the covenant people, and the merits of Abraham may yet be able to stand him in good stead. And Abraham addresses him as “Son,” showing that his claim is recognised. But further, it was taught that the wicked in Hell are capable of repentance; they know why they are in Hell, and acknowledge every sin which had not been atoned for by their death; thus, they are repentant; and this period of repentance, it is said, lasts usually twelve months; then Abraham descends into Hell and brings out the repentant sinner into Paradise: “When the godless have repented Abraham goes down into Gehinnom, he who has kept all the commandments, and, that the name of God may be sanctified, . . . he brings them out through his merits. . . .”<sup>1</sup> When it is remembered that there is every reason to believe that these ideas were current in our Lord’s time, it will be realized that there is some significance in the rich man addressing Abraham as “Father.” He does not ask Abraham to come down to him because he has only just entered the place of torment, and his repentance had only just begun (see below); but he asks that Lazarus may be sent, forgetting that their positions have changed.

“But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art in anguish” (verse 25). It would be a fatal error to

<sup>1</sup> Bab. Talmud, *‘Erubin* 19a; for these and other details see, Weber, *Jüdische Theologie*, pp. 341 ff. (1897).



imagine, as the early Church Fathers did (and some moderns too), that these words laid down a general principle that death brought about for man a fate in direct contrast to that of his earthly life. Not because Dives had been a rich man is he now punished, but because he had been a wicked man, breaking the commandment of God, as we have seen. Not because Lazarus had been a beggar is he now rewarded, but because he had been a righteous man, otherwise he would not have been carried away by the angels.

“And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, that they which would pass from hence to you may not be able, and that none may cross over from thence to us” (verse 26). From what has been said above, namely, the possibility, according to Jewish belief of the times, of issuing from the place of torment, this verse pointedly implies the contrary. It is difficult to get away from the impression that this was intended. But the conception of a “great gulf” between Gehinnom and Gan Eden (Paradise) is not Jewish; it occurs in the later Kabbala; but Rabbinical doctrine knows of no gulf between them.<sup>1</sup> An impartial reading of the text will show that it reads more smoothly without verse 26. May it not be that this verse was interpolated in the early days of Christianity by one who repudiated the Jewish belief of the possibility of a soul issuing from Gehinnom? The utterly anti-Christian belief in eternal damnation owed its origin to feelings far from consonant with the teaching of our Lord; here was an opportunity of imputing to Him a saying according to which a soul having once entered the infernal regions could never come forth from them. It is not without reason that some modern scholars regard this parable as not having been uttered by our Lord; of this we have our doubts; but the possibility must be recognized that, as in some other cases, things have been added which were not in harmony with the teaching of our Lord. It is held by others that while verses 19–25 are genuine, the rest, verses 26–31, are a later addition; but the possibility must be recognized that, although this parable was directly addressed to the Pharisees,

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Weber, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

our Lord may well have taken the opportunity, the subject being what it was, of adding something in correction of Sadducean unbelief. The Sadducees were still an influential party, and there is no reason to suppose that the occasion spoken of in Matth. xxii. 23-33 was the only one on which our Lord dealt with their unbelief. Nevertheless, it must be granted that there are indications (see below) which point to verses 26-31 being a later addition.

“And he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father’s house; for I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment” (verses 27, 28). For one whose whole life had been spent in selfish enjoyment to be thinking at last of someone else seems certainly to point to the beginning of a better frame of mind; we recall what was said above regarding the belief in the possibility of repentance among those whose sinful lives had brought them to the place of torment. “But Abraham saith, They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them” (verse 29). That is to say, if they follow the precepts of the Law and the ethical teaching of the prophets, there is no fear of the brothers coming into the place of torment. It will be noticed that the possibility of a departed spirit coming on earth and warning sinners is taken for granted. The parable then continues: “And he said, Nay, father Abraham; but if one go to them from the dead, they will repent” (verse 30). The words imply the possibility of repentance only while yet living on earth, and this gainsays what is said above about the possibility of repentance after death, as taught by the Rabbis. This contradiction, however, reflects the difference of view actually held by different teachers; “It is characteristic of the Rabbis,” says Mr. Loewe, “that these divergent opinions about repentance after death continued to flourish side by side. The Rabbis did not mind these inconsistencies. They thought of one thing at a time, regardless of consequences. They felt the danger of letting people think that one could repent with ease after death, and thus continue to lead a sinful life upon earth; so they preached the doctrine that after death there could be, and there was, no room or

opportunity for repentance; yet, on the other hand, they were no pessimists, and they were reluctant to put any limit to repentance or forgiveness, and to the grace and forgiveness of God. Hence they *also* taught the doctrine that repentance *was* possible after death. The one doctrine was in flagrant contradiction to the other; but they did not notice, or did not mind, the contradiction. Both doctrines were useful, or even necessary, and so both doctrines were used and taught.”<sup>1</sup>

With the thought of one appearing from the dead, like a “sign from heaven,” compare Matth. xii. 38, 39; Mk. viii. 11, 12. The implication is that “Moses and the prophets,” *i.e.* the preaching and teaching of them in the synagogue, is ineffective; in view of such passages as Matth. v. 17, Lk. xvi. 17, it certainly looks as though some later thought had influenced the latter part of the parable, though we realize the difficulty of coming to definite conclusions on the point.

“And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead” (verse 31). We necessarily think of the account of the raising of Lazarus here (John xi. 1–xii. 2), and the consequent antagonism of the Pharisees mentioned in verses 45 ff. There may be in this verse before us a covert reference to the rejection by the Jews of the Risen Lord. If so, it is a further indication of later Christian influence on the text.

Upon the whole, it must be recognized that there is some justification for the contention of those scholars who hold that the latter part of this parable (verses 26–31) is a later addition. It is more likely to have come from a Jewish-Christian than from a Gentile-Christian. But even if this should be the case, the main teaching of the parable would not be affected.

<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Montefiore, *Rabbinic Literature* . . . , pp. 359 f.

## LECTURE XII

### SOME MINOR PARABLES

It remains to consider a number of short parables found scattered throughout the Gospels. Though these are, as compared with the other parables dealt with, of a minor character, their teaching is too important to be overlooked. We shall take these in the order in which they occur in the Gospels.

Though not actually called a parable in the text, the following is a parable in the literal sense of the word, *i.e.* a comparison: "Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and trodden under foot of men" (Matth. v. 13, cp. Mk. ix. 49, 50; Lk. xiv. 34, 35). In Matthew these words are addressed to the multitudes (see verse 1), so, too, in Luke (see verse 25); but in Mark, as the context shows, it is to the nearer circle of the disciples that they are spoken, and this, without doubt, reflects what originally took place, and it is what the content of the parable demands. The disciples are to be the means of purifying the people by witnessing for Christ in word and act. To the devout Jew of those days the significance of salt was not so much its connexion with food as with worship; in Lev. ii. 13 it is ordained: "And every oblation of thy meal offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God<sup>1</sup> to be lacking from thy meal offering; with all thine oblations thou shalt offer salt" (cf. Num. xviii. 19). Originally, the use of salt mixed with sacrifices was believed to effect a purification of the sacrificial substance in a literal sense;

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "the covenant of thy God" is derived from the thought of the preservative qualities of salt.



but after the Exile its use was purely symbolical; <sup>1</sup> it symbolized the purity of that which was offered to God. When, therefore, our Lord says to the disciples that they are the salt of the earth, the import of the words is in a certain sense similar to that indicated in the parable of the Leaven (Matth. xiii. 33); their purifying influence is to permeate the whole body of believers.<sup>2</sup> No expression could more adequately call forth among the disciples the realization of their high calling, and thus engender their sense of responsibility.

This is further brought out by the little parable which follows (Matth. v. 14, 15): "Ye are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a lamp, and put it under a bushel, but on the stand; and it shineth unto all that are in the house." Here we recall the prophet's words: "It is too light a thing that thou shouldest be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel; I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth" (Isa. xlix. 6). As in the preceding parable the mention of salt may have recalled the usage of the worship in the Temple, so here it is quite possible that the thought of "the light of the world" may have been prompted by the golden candlestick which stood in the Temple, in the Holy Place (Exod. xxv. 31 ff., 1 Macc. i. 21), the "seven-branched candlestick."<sup>3</sup> The Gospels tell us of our Lord's frequent presence in the Temple with the disciples. In this case the "city set on a hill" would refer to Jerusalem; the fact that our Lord was in Galilee (Matth. iv. 23) does not necessarily militate against this; many of the listeners had come from Jerusalem (iv. 25). In the second part of the parable the comparison changes, and the picture is that of a room in a house with the ordinary furniture as found in a Galilæan peasant's home: lamp, lamp-stand, "bushel," and, in the parallel passage in Mk. iv. 21, bed (cp. also Lk. viii. 16, xi. 33). As to the word "bushel" (*μóδιος* <sup>4</sup> = Hebr. *se'ah*),

<sup>1</sup> Cp. the use of salt in the Christian Church in connexion with the baptism of catechumens.

<sup>2</sup> See, further, Dodd, *op. cit.*, pp. 139 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See Josephus, *Bell. Jud.*, v. 216, 217.

<sup>4</sup> The term occurs on the papyri, see Moulton and Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, s.v.

this is equivalent to the English peck, more or less, a dry measure used by the householder when buying flour, etc.; the mention of this as part of the "house" furniture brings home the realism so often evident in our Lord's parables; the familiar scene appears in the mental vision of the hearers, immediately gaining their sympathetic attention; and, on entering the home later, all would be recalled of what the Teacher had said. Spoken, according to the Marcan account, to the disciples, these two short parables were for them of grave import and significance, for the words were an exhortation to them to appear boldly among men, both as a means of purifying from sin and as a means of enlightenment concerning the message of which they were the bearers. Hence the words which follow: "Even so let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." How the disciples acted upon our Lord's words is seen, *e.g.*, in Mk. vi. 7-13, 30-32.<sup>1</sup>

Our next parable occurs in Matth. vii. 24-27 (cp. Lk. vi. 47-49); it deals with the house on the rock. The essence of this parable is contained in the two contrasted sayings: "Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man . . .," and: "Every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man . . ." This parable forms the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, and has reference to all the teaching of our Lord therein contained. It illustrates, especially, the

<sup>1</sup> Dodd explains this parable in the following way: "It draws a picture of the extreme folly of putting a lighted lamp in the very place where its light becomes useless. In the situation in which Jesus spoke, what was the outstanding example of such folly? Was it not, in His eyes, the conduct of the religious leaders of His time, who, as He said, shut the Kingdom of Heaven in men's faces (Matth. xxiii. 13, Lk. xi. 52), or, in other words, hid from them the light of God's revelation? Once again, therefore, we seem to have a parable which was originally a biting comment upon the actual situation, but which the evangelists have used to convey teaching or warning to the Church of their day: to wit, either that Christians should show forth God's glory by their good works; or that the time has come when the mystery of the Kingdom of God should be blazoned abroad; or, in general, that truth shines by its own light" (*op. cit.*, p. 145). The parable has a different setting in Lk. xi. 33, and it is, of course, possible that the evangelists used it for their own specific purposes; but may it not be that in this, as in some other cases, the evangelists are echoing something that our Lord Himself taught and said?

words: "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven," which refer to two types of men both of whom acknowledge Christ; so that in the parable the contrast is not between a believer and an unbeliever, for both hear Christ's words. But further, the words which immediately precede the parable (verses 22, 23) speak of those who prophesy, or preach, in Christ's name, cast out demons, and do mighty works; so that in the parable the contrast is not between one who does works and one who does not. This accounts for what appears at first sight to be an inappropriate parallel, hearing words and building a house. There is nothing inappropriate in this when one remembers that both types of men not only hear, but also "build up" works. The difficulty of the parable lies here: to whom is our Lord referring when He speaks of those who hear His words and do mighty works in His name, and to whom He yet says, "I never knew you"? It will be seen that in the parallel passage in Lk. vi. 47-49 this difficulty is avoided; there it is simply the contrast between him who "heareth my words, and doeth them," and him who "heareth, and doeth not"; and there is no parallel to verses 22, 23. The fact is that in Matthew the parable, together with the section in which it occurs (verses 15-27), is told in an eschatological sense; it is "in that day" that what is said in the parable is to be referred; this is not the case with Luke. The section begins with, "Beware of false prophets"; but in our Lord's day these had not yet arisen; they are mentioned in 2 Pet. ii. 1 (cp. Acts xiii. 6), and false apostles are spoken of in 2 Cor. xi. 13. It looks as if the Matthæan account had been influenced by Lk. xiii. 22-30, which belongs to a different period of our Lord's ministry, and in which eschatological thought comes in appropriately. But in our parable, which so pointedly deals with the present, this eschatological element is inappropriate, and, as we have seen, the earlier, Lucan form does not have it. It is, therefore, on this latter form that we concentrate attention. And in this original form of the parable the contrast is between him who hears, and does,



and him who hears, and does not; in other words, it is a question of *works*. Our Lord's emphasis on the need of works is of great importance and interest. It is generally held, and probably with justice, that the Jewish religious leaders laid overmuch stress on the efficacy of works; the performance of *Mitzvoth*, "Commandments" of the Law, was a means of atonement for sin, and therefore of justification. This teaching is found already in *Ecclesiasticus*, e.g.: "Water will quench a flaming fire, and almsgiving will make atonement for sins" (iii. 30), and in the later Rabbinical literature it is greatly developed by the doctrine of *Zacuth*, a word which "is used in the sense of merit, virtue, which under certain conditions have a protective or an atoning influence."<sup>1</sup> But it is evident that in much earlier days reliance on the efficacy of works assumed exaggerated proportions, as shown by St. Paul's words: ". . . knowing that a man is not justified by works of the law . . . that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the law; because by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (Gal. ii. 16); or, again, in Eph. ii. 8, 9: "For by grace ye have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, that no man should glory." That there was, however, the danger of exaggeration in the other direction may be gathered from what is said in the epistle of James: "What doth it profit, my brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but have not works? can that faith save him? . . . Even so faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. . . . But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith apart from works is barren? . . . Ye see that by works a man is justified, and not only by faith" (ii. 14-26).

Now, it is when we turn to our parable that we find the true balance between these two positions: "Every one therefore which heareth these words of mine, and doeth them"; on the one hand, faith is generated by hearing (cp. Rom. x. 17: "So belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ"), and, on the other, the doing of

<sup>1</sup> Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 171 (1909). On the Jewish doctrine of works see, further, above, pp. 104, 110 f.



the commandments, or words, is the earnest of faith. "Doing" words, which sounds a little strange to our ears, is the regular Jewish expression used in phrases such as "doing (*i.e.* fulfilling) the commandments," "doing righteousness," and others.

Attention is drawn by various writers <sup>1</sup> to a Jewish parable which is very similar to that under consideration; this parable is of sufficient interest to merit quotation here:

"Elisha ben Abujah said, A man who does good works and who learns much Torah, with whom is he to be compared? To a man who builds (a house) with stones for its foundation [lit. underneath], and bricks of clay (above). Though the floods [lit. much water] come and beat upon the side thereof, they cannot wash it away from its place. And a man who does not do good works and (yet) learns the Torah, with whom is he to be compared? To a man who builds with bricks of clay first, and thereafter with stones. Even if but little water flows, it falls at once. He used to say (further): <sup>2</sup> A man who does good works and who learns much Torah, wherewith is he to be compared? With chalk spread out over stones. Though the rains descend they do not move it from the spot. (But) a man who does not do good works, and (yet) learns much Torah, is like chalk spread out over bricks of clay. Even if but little rain descends upon it, it gives way at once and falls."

Elisha ben Abujah, who is said to have put forth this parable, lived during the earlier part of the second century A.D.; in Rabbinical literature he is often referred to as "Acher" (*i.e.* "the other one"); ultimately he apostatized from Judaism, and has been designated the "Faust of the Talmud." The parallel between this parable and Matth. vii. 24-27 is striking, and Fiebig has pointed to the verbal identities between the two; as the Jewish parable is the later of the two, it is possible that the writer was indebted to the Gospel, especially as he renounced the Jewish faith; but Burkitt believes that, if there was borrowing, "it was

<sup>1</sup> *E.g.*, Fiebig, *op. cit.*, pp. 81 f.; the parable in question occurs in *Aboth de Rabbi Nathan*, xxiv.

<sup>2</sup> *I.e.*, another form of the parable.

probably second-hand, *i.e.* from one of the Minim,"<sup>1</sup> and that it was put down to Elisha ben Abujah "to avoid offence."<sup>2</sup> It seems, however, more likely that we have here another case of a parabolical theme current already in pre-Christian times, which was utilized and adapted; so that there is not necessarily any question of borrowing. The origin of the theme may possibly be traced back to Ezek. xiii. 10-16.

We deal, in the next place, with the parable about Satan casting out Satan, together with some passages connected with it. This parable occurs in all three Gospels (Matth. xii. 25-30, 43-45; Mk. iii. 23-27; Lk. xi. 17-26). With the variations in the records we shall not deal, but shall concentrate on the more essential points. In all three Gospels our Lord is accused of casting out demons by means of the prince of the demons, who in Matthew and Luke is called Beelzebub,<sup>3</sup> identified with Satan. In Matth. x. 25 our Lord says that He had been directly called Beelzebub. With the large subject of Jewish demonology, which is reflected in the Gospels we cannot deal here.<sup>4</sup>

The occasion of the parable arose after the curing of one "blind and dumb." According to Matth. xii. 24 the accusation against our Lord was made by the Pharisees; Mk. iii. 22 says: "the scribes which came down from Jerusalem"; Lk. xi. 15: "But some of them (*i.e.* of the multitudes) said . . ."; but there can be little doubt that the two latter must be understood as including the Pharisees. "This man doth not cast out demons, but by Beelzebub the prince of the demons." The parable which follows has this peculiar to itself that it is the only one spoken in regard to our Lord Himself; and in spite of the dreadful accusation brought against Him, the reply, so far as He was concerned

<sup>1</sup> By this term is meant those who differed from the orthodox belief of the Jews, including Sadducees, Samaritans, Christians, Gnostics, and heretics generally.

<sup>2</sup> *Journal of Theological Studies*, xiv. 618.

<sup>3</sup> Identical with the god of Ekron mentioned in 2 Kgs. i. 2, 3; a variant form is Beelzebul which the older MSS. have; cp. Beliar and Belial. Josephus calls the god of Ekron "the Fly" (*Antiq.* ix. 19), hence Jerome's translation, "the lord of flies" (*dominus muscarum*).

<sup>4</sup> See the present writer's articles in the *Expositor*, Vol. III, pp. 316-332, 527-544 (1907).

was: "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him!" The opponents of our Lord frankly admit His power of being able to exorcize demons; and He does not deny that they, too, have this power of healing; but if His opponents were able to act without the help of Beelzebub, why should He be accused of using this agency? The accusation was, therefore, unfair as well as blasphemous; but it was also foolish; and this is particularly brought out by the parable. In the Marcan form the parable is introduced by the question: "How can Satan cast out Satan?" whereby the illogical nature of the accusation is emphasized. Satan is represented as the ruler of a kingdom; his ministers are the demons, and it is in the interests of both that subjects should be gained for this Kingdom, in the shape of human souls. It is contrary to reason to suppose that they of this kingdom would act against their own interests; "if a kingdom be divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand"; in the same way, "if a house be divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." No, if a demon has been cast out, it can only be that a power opposed to that of Satan, a power stronger than his, is at work: "no one can enter into the house of the strong man, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house."<sup>1</sup> Those words express, in effect, our Lord's consciousness of His power to overcome the powers of darkness. And this is further brought out by the words: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you."<sup>2</sup> Immediately preceding these words our Lord says: "If I by Beelzebub cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? therefore shall they be your judges," *i.e.* let them be your judges; the point is that there were only two alternatives: either by Beelzebub, as the Pharisees had suggested in the case of our Lord, or by God, as they actually believed; but clearly the Pharisees could not imagine that

<sup>1</sup> Cp. Isa. xlix. 24, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Luke has "by the finger of God"; this phrase occurs in Exod. viii. 19, xxxi. 18, and simply means the power of God; cp. "the arm of the Lord," *i.e.*, the purpose, or power, of the Lord.

their own followers<sup>1</sup> cast out demons by Beelzebub; demons could only be cast out with divine help; so that these Jewish exorcists, honoured by the Pharisees for their extraordinary power, would have been the first to condemn the mad folly of saying that demons could be cast out by Satan.<sup>2</sup>

In Luke there follows immediately after this parable a further one (xi. 24-26), which clearly belongs to what has preceded; in Matthew, however, the parallel to this comes later: "But the unclean spirit, when he is gone out of the man, passeth through waterless places, seeking rest, and findeth it not. Then he saith, I will return into my house whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. Then goeth he and taketh with himself seven other spirits more evil than himself, and they enter in and dwell there; and the last state of that man cometh worse than the first." The final words: "Even so shall it be unto this evil generation," do not occur in Luke, and refer to what has been said in Matth. xii. 38-42 about "an evil and adulterous generation." This parable has been admirably explained by Burkitt, and we cannot do better than quote his words: "It simply assumes the then popular belief about demoniacs and the cause of their affliction, a belief which is set forth in Enoch, chap. xv. There we read that the demons are the progeny of the heavenly Sons of God and the Daughters of men (cp. Gen. vi. 1, 2). They are 'spirit' like their fathers, but they cannot rise far from the surface of the earth, the home of their mothers, and they are evil, 'oppressive, destroying, attacking, wrestling, casting men upon the ground (cp. Mk. ix. 20), making them run mad (cp. Jn. x. 20), spirits that can eat nothing, but fast all the time, and thirst, and dash themselves about. And these attack the sons of men and women, because they have come forth from them' (Enoch xv. 3-12). It is the same doctrine as is presupposed in the Gospel; the unclean demons are about in the air (cp. Eph. ii. 2), seeking rest and finding none except in the human body. . . .

<sup>1</sup> "Your sons" means those who were companions or adherents, cp. "sons of the bride-chamber" (Mk. ii. 19).

<sup>2</sup> Irenæus (*Hæc.* II. vi. 2) says that Jews in his day drove out demons by invoking the name of the Lord (*McNeile, op. cit.*, p. 176).



'It is by no pact with the powers of evil,' says Jesus in effect, 'that I exorcise unclean spirits from those you bring to me; I am neither setting forth a new doctrine nor practising new and unlawful methods. If I can do good to men because the spirit that is with me is the spirit of God, it shows you the Kingdom of God at your doors before you were aware of it (ἐφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς). The power of God is with me, stronger than the powers of evil (Matth. xii. 26-29; Lk. xi. 18-22). Which side will you take? (Matth. xii. 30; Lk. xi. 23). Blessed are they that hear the word of God and also keep it; you hear the word now; take care that presently you do not lose it again, like a man who has been set free from the dominion of the Evil One, but afterwards is taken possession of once more. If you neglect to take my message to heart, your last state will be worse than it was before you listened to it' (Matth. xii. 43-45; Lk. xi. 24-28).'<sup>1</sup>

A parable of a very different nature, with which we will deal next, is one peculiar to Luke, and occurs in xi. 5-8. It is a kind of commentary on the Lord's Prayer which immediately precedes it, and takes the form of a question: "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go to him at midnight, and shall say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not; the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot rise and give thee?" Here is presented again a picture familiar to the Galilæan peasant; the small loaves, baked by the peasant's wife, were placed in a basket; bread was not baked every day so that it would happen that a family might temporarily run short; hence a Jewish proverb: "Better it is for him who has bread in his basket than for him who has no bread in his basket."<sup>2</sup> There is, therefore, nothing out of the way when in the parable one man has no bread in his house, while his friend has; nor that the man takes for granted that his friend can supply him. The late arrival from the journey

<sup>1</sup> *Jewish and Christian Apocalypses*, pp. 22 f.

<sup>2</sup> Bab. Talmud, *Jebamoth* 18 b and elsewhere, quoted by Krauss, *op. cit.*, i. 465.

again reflects what was quite usual seeing that in the hot climate journeying was preferably undertaken by the light of the moon. Familiar, too, was the picture of the door, shut for the night, with its wooden bar fixed in the sockets of the posts on either side of the door; <sup>1</sup> and the bed which was usually large enough for two or three <sup>2</sup> to lie in (cp. Lk. xvii. 34). In the quiet of the night the man is disturbed by the calling of his friend outside in the street; to be awaked up like that is not pleasant, and the children's sleep should not be broken; to get up and open the door in the dark is also annoying. So the man refuses to get out of bed and oblige his friend. It is all a very human picture. But the parable does not end there. Though not directly expressed, it is implied that the friend outside went on calling, so that the man in bed realizes that there will be no peace until he does as his friend asks; and the parable continues: "I say unto you, though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise, and give him as many as he needeth." The crucial word here is "importunity" (*ἀναιδία*); it occurs nowhere else in the New Testament,<sup>3</sup> and very rarely on the papyri, and then not in the form of the noun; it connotes there the ideas of desiring to get, and of shamelessness, in different contexts.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps in our parable the word might be rendered best by "persistence"; that is suggested by our Lord's own comments on His parable: "And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. . . ." Before touching upon the subject of prayer and its characteristic of persistence which this parable emphasizes, there is another parable to be considered which is of similar import. It is again peculiar to Luke, and occurs in xviii. 1-8. At first sight, this parable seems to be quite unconnected with its context; it is only when we come to our Lord's words after the conclusion of the parable itself that one sees its connexion with what has preceded; those words are: "Howbeit, when the Son of

<sup>1</sup> For references see Krauss, *op. cit.*, i. 39 f.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 387.

<sup>3</sup> Its occurrence in Eccclus. xxv. 22 is a misunderstanding of the Hebrew.

<sup>4</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *op. cit.*, s.v.

man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (verse 8). These words, spoken in reference to our Lord's Second Coming, show that the parable must be read in connexion with that subject: ". . . in the day that the Son of man is revealed" (verse 30). The parable, therefore, teaches the need of persistent prayer because of the Second Coming, which is imminent. "And he spake a parable unto them to the end that they ought always to pray, and not to faint, saying . . ." The parable is spoken, not to the multitudes, but to the disciples (verse 22); "always" must, in view of what is said in the parable, be understood in the sense of "persistently." By "not to faint" is meant, not to lose heart, as the use of the word elsewhere shows (2 Cor. iv. 1; Gal. vi. 9; Eph. iii. 13). The word occurs very rarely outside the New Testament, but it is used once of "having cowardice."<sup>1</sup> The point, therefore, is that if the prayer is not immediately answered there is no need to lose heart, or to be afraid of going on praying. This is graphically brought out in the parable. "There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, and regarded not man"; the judge is called, later in the parable, "the judge of unrighteousness" (ὁ κριτὴς τῆς ἀδικίας), a Hebrew form of expression, and representing a type of man of the worst kind (for ἀδικία see Rom. i. 18; and cp. i Cor. vi. 1, 9), an iniquitous judge. The reason why a man of this character is presented in the parable is to emphasize the fact that he would not be actuated by any good motive in acceding to anyone's request; hence the need of persistence in making it. The person of a widow is chosen because she represents one who is utterly helpless; she has nothing, and there is nobody to support her; she has only her own pleading to rely upon. The widow comes to the judge, saying: "Avenge me of mine adversary." Doubtless we are to suppose that this was said in a pleading tone, but the curtness of the address is striking; no "Sir," and no "Please"; it is, perhaps, not fanciful to see here the note of despair which makes a request so poignant; even that does not touch the judge's heart. The evidence of the papyri shows that the rendering "Avenge

<sup>1</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *op. cit.*, s.v. ἐγκαλέω.

me" (ἐκδίκησόν με) may be misunderstood; from this evidence "it would appear that the thought of 'avenge' is not necessarily primary in Lk. xviii. 3 ff., but rather of 'do right to,' and so 'protect' the wronged party";<sup>1</sup> so that the marginal rendering of the Revised Version here is preferable: "Do me justice." The Greek for "adversary" (ἀντίδικος) is a common legal word used for the opponent in a lawsuit. The parable continues: "And he would not for a while"; the time is quite indefinite, but, as the context shows, the widow went on pleading with him during the whole time: "but afterwards he said within himself, though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest she wear me out by her continual coming." The parable ends abruptly, but it is taken for granted that the judge does as he was asked. Before we consider the difficult words which follow it as commentary, we must point to a passage which may quite possibly have been in our Lord's mind in uttering the parable. The passage in question occurs in Eccclus. xxxv. (xxxii.) 15-25 (12-19); the interest of the passage must excuse its length; we take it from the Hebrew, as this is extant: ". . . For a God of justice is he, and with him there is no partiality. He will not show partiality against a poor man, but hearkeneth unto the supplication of the distressed. He doth not despise the cry of the orphan, nor the widow when she poureth out her complaint. Doth not the tear run down upon the cheek? And (is there not) groaning because of him that causeth it to run down? (Such) a groaning of bitterness is an accepted offering, and it reacheth unto the clouds. The cry of the poor passeth through the clouds, and resteth not until it reacheth (God); it will not cease till God doth visit, and the righteous judge execute judgement. Yea, the Lord will not tarry, and the Mighty One will not hold back, till he smite the loins of the merciless, and requite vengeance on the arrogant, till he take away the sceptre of pride and wholly destroy [lit. cut off] the staff of wickedness, till he render to man (according to) his deed, and recompense him (according to) his

<sup>1</sup> Moulton and Milligan, *op. cit.*, s.v.



thought, till he plead the cause of his people, and make them glad with his help." In this passage we have the picture of the truly righteous Judge, and it is in contrast to Him that the judge in the parable is presented. It is unnecessary to emphasize the various points of contact between the two passages.

We come now to the words of comment on the parable: "And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is long-suffering over them? I say unto you that he will avenge them speedily. Howbeit, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" So far as the teaching of the parable itself is concerned it is entirely parallel with the one we have considered previously (Lk. xi. 5-8). In both parables the acts of "sons of this world," namely, the granting of requests made, are pointed to as something good, even though they are not actuated by right motives; it is similar to what we have seen was the case in the parable of the Unrighteous Steward. But in the words which follow our present parable there is the difficulty that the action of the unrighteous judge is made parallel with that of God in hearing prayer, as though it were but grudgingly that God did so. One way in which, as it seems to us, this can be explained is by supposing that these words have got into a wrong context, this being due to the fact that "Howbeit, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" were understood in an eschatological sense, and that therefore the whole of verses 7, 8 were thought to belong to the eschatological section (verses 22-37) which immediately precedes the parable. Another alternative is to regard the parable itself as having been designedly placed where it now is—though this was not originally so—because it was used to illustrate the need of prayer for the Second Coming, on the basis of "Thy Kingdom come."

But however this may be, the teaching of the parable is clear; like the parable previously considered (xi. 5-8) it emphasizes the need of persistent prayer; and this is said in reference to individual prayer as distinct from communal

prayer; to this latter our Lord refers elsewhere (*e.g.* Matth. xxi. 13), but it is certain that in the Gospels more stress is laid on individual than on communal prayer. Here it is of interest to note that in the Old Testament communal prayer is rarely mentioned in the earlier days, even after the building of the Temple; but there are many instances of individual prayer; apart from such as occur in Gen. xviii. 23-33, xx. 17, xxiv. 12-14, xxxii. 9-12, Exod. xxxii. 31, 32, there are others, and, above all, those in the earlier psalms, which originally were not liturgical. On the other hand, in post-exilic times individual prayer is rarely mentioned, while communal prayer becomes more prominent; this is seen more especially in the later psalms, and indeed in the whole of the Psalter which became purely liturgical. So that when, in the Gospels we find so much stress laid on individual prayer, it is permissible to believe that our Lord was insisting on something the need of which had been largely lost sight of. Not that our Lord was in any way discouraging communal prayer. His constant presence in the Temple shows that—it will be realized that the synagogue in His day had not yet become a house of prayer, it was a place of teaching—but individual prayer among the Jews would seem in His day not to have occupied the place that it should have done. Eisenstein quotes some passages showing that among many of the Rabbis individual prayer was not regarded as very important: <sup>1</sup> “In Talmudic times the prayers were not recited generally, except among the middle-classes. Rabbi Gamaliel <sup>2</sup> exempted from prayer husbandmen and working men, who were represented by the readers of the congregation. The higher class, that is, the scholars, would not be disturbed in their studies, which they considered of superior importance to prayers.” Rabbi Ze’ira <sup>3</sup> taught: “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination”; and a contemporary of his, Rabba ben Nachmani, said: “they put aside everlasting life (*i.e.* the law), and concern

<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Encyclopædia*, x. 166 b.

<sup>2</sup> He flourished at the beginning of the Christian era, see Acts v. 34, 39.

<sup>3</sup> His date is later, beginning of the fourth century.

themselves with the temporal life (*i.e.* praying for maintenance),” referring to those who lingered over their prayers.<sup>1</sup> Though this appears to reflect the attitude of many teachers, it is only right to point out that others must have thought differently about prayer; it may well be that the following saying, belonging, it is true, to later times, re-echoes the sentiments of pious Rabbis in earlier days; it is in reference to Jer. xiv. 8: “God is the *Mikweh* of Israel, which word the Rabbis take to mean ‘the source of purity’ (Israel’s purification being established by attachment to God). God says to Israel, I bade thee read thy prayers unto me in thy synagogues; but if thou canst not, pray in thy house; and if thou art unable to do this, pray when thou art in the field; but if this be inconvenient to thee, pray on thy bed; and if thou canst not do even this, think of me in thy heart.”<sup>2</sup>

In both the parables on prayer which we have been considering a difficulty is felt by many regarding importunate—we should prefer to call it persistent—prayer. Such passages as Matth. vi. 8, 32 are pointed to: “Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him”; “Your Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” Why, then, it is asked, should they be prayed for, and, especially, why should they be persistently prayed for? The difficulty is, of course, age-long. This is not the place to enter upon a discourse on prayer; but this question of *persistent* prayer does suggest one or two considerations. Prayer, in any case, witnesses to the yearning for communion with God; persistent prayer only emphasizes this. If God knows what our needs are, that should impel the petitioner to pray the more to the Omnipotent One to grant what is asked for, because this is the earnest of faith and sincerity. Why *should* God answer prayer, or even notice it, unless the proof is there that the prayer is offered in sincerity and earnestness and real desire, which can be shown forth only by persistence? In every other sphere the goal must be reached by energizing, persistent, effort; should that

<sup>1</sup> Bab. Talmud, *Shabbath*, 10 a, quoted by Eisenstein.

<sup>2</sup> *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, 157 b, 158 a, quoted by Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, p. 156 (1909).

not be so in the greatest of all strivings? Persistence in prayer is not inconsistent with the conviction that God's will must come first, for underlying every genuine prayer there must lurk the condition, whether expressed or not, "Thy will, not mine, be done"; otherwise the true essence of prayer would be lacking. And it is not in contradiction with this to say that persistent prayer is one of the ways whereby, through divine grace, human free will, at its best, is fostered; prayer is prompted by our wants and desires, spiritual and material, asked for in all humility; and when man's will in prayer is brought into conformity with the will of God, then human free will is sanctified, and becomes pleasing to God; human free will, that is to say, is strengthened by persistent prayer in the most exalted and God-like direction.

u This brings us to our last parable; Lk. xviii. 9-14 (again found only in the third Gospel), which tells us of an indispensable quality in man when approaching his Creator. "And he spake also this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought." The "certain" can hardly refer to any but the Pharisees, or rather a certain type of Pharisees, who, through their observance of the precepts of the Law, were convinced of their righteousness; this generated a feeling of superiority, together with a deplorable contempt for others ("this multitude which knoweth not the law are accursed," spoken by the Pharisees, Jn. vii. 49). We recall here the feeling of the Pharisees towards the publicans and sinners, brought out in Lk. v. 30. ". . . Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" It would be difficult to point to any, other than the Pharisees, to whom the words, "which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and set all others at nought," could well apply. The parable runs: "Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican." It is usually held, no doubt rightly, that one of the regularly appointed hours of prayer is here assumed (cp. Acts iii. 1: "Peter and John were going up into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour"); if we may judge from the immemorial use of the synagogue services, the hours of prayer were morning, afternoon, and evening



(cp. Dan. vi. 10); the prayers offered by the accredited official were handed down by word of mouth; it was not until the fifth or sixth century A.D. that prayers were permitted to be written down.<sup>1</sup> The Synagogue services were based upon those of the Temple, and a number of the synagogal prayers are demonstrably pre-Christian; they were recited by an official, of whom the later counterpart was the *Chazzan* (lit. "overseer"). When, therefore, in the parable it goes on to say: "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself," it is in reference to his inner spirit and disposition preparatory to the public service of prayer. While the ordinary attitude during prayer was that of standing (cp. Mk. xi. 25)—the chief prayer of the Synagogue, which contains many pre-Christian elements, is called *Amidah*, "standing"—there were also other attitudes: lying prostrate, kneeling, and, at times, sitting. The causes of the Pharisee's self-gratulation in the parable are, for the most part, nothing to boast about; to restrain from extortion, injustice, and adultery ought to be taken for granted on the part of one professing godliness; but that is a trait in the character of certain types of men. It is not so much the refraining from evil, which should be self-understood, but purposeful activity in the service of God which constitutes the true believer. In this latter the Pharisee is not, it is true, altogether wanting: "I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all I get"; nothing very great, and somewhat spoilt by self-laudation; but in so far as it expressed a conscious desire to fulfil the Law, it was good. Nevertheless, whatever sparks of praiseworthiness the Pharisee might have possessed, they were overshadowed by his hateful contempt for his fellow-worshipper: "or even as this publican"! Absence of the love of God because of love of self is further aggravated by utter lack of love for his neighbour. Some contempt for the publican, as publican, was doubtless justified, but not as man. And as to him, it is said: "But the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote his breast, saying, God, be merciful to

<sup>1</sup> Elbogen, *Der jüdische Gottesdienst in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, p. 3 (1913).

me a sinner." Very significant is his "standing afar off," that is, apart from the other worshippers, among whom he felt unworthy to stand; not only in the sight of God did he feel his unworthiness, but also in that of his fellow-creatures. The great theme of self-knowledge is not that of this parable, it is true; but one cannot fail to see that it is hinted at in the bowed head, the downcast eye, the smiting on the breast, and the "God, be merciful to me a sinner." Our Lord's comment on the parable runs: "I say unto you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

While this parable does not deal with the nature of prayer and what must be the true characteristics of prayer, it tells of what must be the attitude, the disposition, of him who prays; for that affects the efficacy of prayer. The relationship between God and man must be sustained by prayer; but even prayer, if it come from a heart that is not right with God, is unacceptable; and the relationship is broken.

Our parable presents us with two types of believers with whom our Lord must frequently have come in contact; He utters elsewhere some words which may be quoted as a striking commentary on the parable: "I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matth. v. 20).

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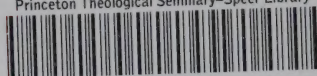




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